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# THE ECLIPSE OF RUSSIA

BY

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"Russian Characteristics," etc.*



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**TO THE MEMORY OF  
MY FRIEND AND RUSSIA'S UNIQUE STATESMAN  
S. I. WITTE**





# **THE ECLIPSE OF RUSSIA**



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## CHAPTER I

### THE RUSSIAN ENIGMA

THE misfortunes of Russia and the disillusion of the nations that trusted her promises and relied on her help are attributed to no one circumstance more markedly than the failure of the interested statesmen to grasp the purely predatory character of the Tsardom, its incompatibility with the politico-social ordering of latter-day Europe, the pressing necessity on the one hand and the almost insuperable difficulty on the other of remodelling and adapting it to its European environment. It is no exaggeration to affirm that the history of drifting Europe—excluding the Central Empires—during the past quarter of a century, and of the outbreak of the awful struggle at its close, is the story of a tissue of deplorable mistakes—a tragedy of errors culminating in a catastrophe. The delusion of statesmen about the Tsardom, its origins and its drift, are the least blameworthy. For Russia is a cryptic volume to Slav nations, and to Britons a book with seven seals. Her own ruling class constantly misread the workings of her peoples' mind. Even the close observer who classified the strange phenomena that unfolded themselves to his eye seldom traced them back to their causes or realised their various bearings. Between Slav and Saxon, in particular, there yawns a psychological abyss wide enough in places to sunder two different species of beings not merely two separate races. And of all Slav peoples the Russian is by far the most complex and puzzling. He often raises expectations which a supernatural entity could hardly fulfil, and awakens apprehensions which only a miracle could lay, yet somehow neither hopes nor fears are realised and, as they fade away, one wonders how they could ever have been entertained. In truth, Sarmatia is a

realm of illusions where the goddess Maya is hardly less active or thaumaturgic than in the Buddhist world of shows.

Unsophisticated foreigners are bewildered by the contrasts, subtleties, and contradictions that mark the thoughts and acts of the articulate, to say nothing of the inarticulate, Russian nation. In vain they strive to disentangle the skein of events and episodes in which these utter themselves. Nor do they perceive their own errors until it is too late. It is a noteworthy illustration of the easy-going ways of the Entente Governments that they should have accepted as adequate accounts of things Russian the fanciful pictures reflected in the minds of foreigners ignorant of the country, the history, the people, and the language. It fell to my lot more than once to hear the wildest theories propounded by responsible ministers during the war on the strength of such misleading reports, and I have seen political measures adopted which were bound to defeat the objects for which they were planned.

Even Russian statements have to be placed, so to say, in quarantine and truth sifted carefully from fiction. I remember an interesting illustration that came under my cognisance one evening soon after the promulgation of the Constitution of October, 1905, which was extorted from the Tsar by Count Witte. The press was discussing the question of how the future Duma should be elected, by direct universal, equal, and secret suffrage or otherwise. I was sitting in the Winter Palace with Witte when Count B. and Prince U., both of whom were afterwards elected to the first Duma, were announced. They were shown in. "We are come," said Count B., "from the country where we enjoy the confidence of the peasant population, and we wish you to know that we are absolutely opposed to direct universal suffrage. Absolutely. Under no conditions will we accept it, because it would lead to the ruin of the Empire. So true is this and so firm is our resolve to save the country from this calamity that if you make the suffrage direct or universal we two will march to Petersburg at the head of our armed peasants and will fight until the decree is rescinded. Please communicate this respectfully to his Majesty."

Witte calmed the fiery passion of the count and the two visitors left. A fortnight later there was a dispute among the cabinet ministers on the subject of the suffrage. The Tsar displayed his interest in the matter, and Witte decided to send for Count B. and Prince U. and to give them an opportunity of laying before the sovereign the views of the population in that province of Central Russia. But when they arrived he stood aghast to hear Count B. inveigh in unmeasured terms against those short-sighted individuals who dared to restrict the suffrage and deprive the Tsar's loyal subjects of their right to vote for, or against, a candidate. "But," expostulated Witte, "was it not you who fourteen days ago said the very opposite and threatened to march on the capital at the head of the armed peasants if we enacted what you now demand?" "Yes, yes, I know all that. But during that fortnight I have been among the peasants and asked them for their views. And what is more, I can tell you that most Russians of the intelligentsia are of the same mind. And I am anxious to tell his Majesty how they think and feel on the subject."

As I was very well acquainted with Count B. I took him aside and taunted him with his sudden change of front, but he defended himself, urging quite seriously, "Most of my friends are for universal suffrage. So is the general public. Surely that is a good reason for yielding to the consensus of opinion." Down to the Revolution Count B. played a prominent but not a helpful part in Russian politics.

The struggle which, since the year 1904, has been going on in the Tsardom was so tremendous, the interests involved were so many and mixed, and the vicissitudes of the contest so frequent and sudden, that to be understood even approximately they need to be approached from more than one angle. The analyses made by the Russian people themselves, which are among the most instructive, are not by any means the most trustworthy. For class misunderstands class hopelessly. Indeed, the extent to which Russian observers have gone astray in their appreciation and forecast of events and situations, and in their interpretation of the nation's ideas

and aspirations, would astonish the reader if it could be set forth in detail. A few of the more striking instances may here suffice.

In the 'seventies the two main parties that advocated a revolution were anxious to get hold of the emancipated peasants and to energise them. But they had no knowledge of the people, whose soul was, to use a Russian saying, a dusky forest. They agreed, therefore, that their best plan would be to merge themselves in the peasantry, to live the unenviable life of the tiller of the soil, and to interest them actively in the upheaval that would bring about the millennium. Representative men and women of all the "intelligent" classes accordingly swelled the ranks of these apostles, and with alternating self-denial and self-indulgence, devoid of measure, self-discipline, and coherency, took to the life of squalor and hardship to which the *mooshik*<sup>1</sup> has for ages been inured and diversified it by bouts of looseness and back-sliding. Adoration of the people whom they hoped to indoctrinate and inspire was the new religion which the "intellectuals" preached and for a time endeavoured to practise. They looked upon the nation as a body mystical, somewhat as Roman Catholics regard their Church, but they went further than the Roman Catholic and worshipped the object of their veneration, sacrificed their ease to it, and in some cases died for it. Yet they were aggressive atheists withal, and atheists who took their dogmatic negation second-hand from foreign writers without verification or study. With no attainable goal, no lode star in their strivings, no inspiring dogma to sustain them, no cleanliness, moral or ethical, in their habits, with hardly a trace of conscience and no sense of individual duty,<sup>2</sup> they fancied that having fashioned a deity they could yoke it to their char-à-banc and drive to a marvellous Utopia. Everybody who disagreed with them was anathema, and even those who were not actually with them were under their ban. For they were the most intolerant of despots. My friend Leskoff, one of Russia's most gifted novelists, whose politics were colour-

<sup>1</sup> One of the Russian words for peasant.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Landmarks*, 1910.

less rather than reactionary, was systematically ignored by them, and none of the Liberal reviews or newspapers would dare to publish a favourable notice of his works. Vladimir Solovieff, Russia's unique philosopher, was sneered at as a visionary, and Dostoyeffsky set down as an obscurantist, because they reproached those self-made missionaries with harbouring a fundamentally false idea of the Russian people and with being ignorant of its aims and aspirations. These courageous writers added that it was mischievous presumption in men of unclean lives, changeful purpose, and misty notions of science to hope to bring about the transfiguration of the masses and lead them to an enchanted, unpromised land.

After a long series of disillusiones, rebuffs, and humiliations, the zeal of the revolutionary *Narodniki*<sup>1</sup> cooled. They were forced to the conclusion that their reading of the peoples' strivings was wrong, that their own impulsive action was distinctly baleful, and that the success of the cause for which they had sacrificed so much must lie in other directions.

Years after,<sup>2</sup> my friend Witte, together with several of his colleagues, when preparing the electoral law for the first Duma, fell into a like error. Regarding the peasants as the most conservative element in the Empire he gave them the preponderance in the Chamber and then found that he had wholly mistaken their temper and misinterpreted their aims. The mistakes made by the Kadets<sup>3</sup> ever since they organised their party were equally glaring and much more sinister. More than once this influential party had their own object and seemingly the fate of the nation well within their reach, but by misreading the character of their people and shaping their tactics congruously with this false conception they forfeited their chances. The first of these missed opportunities occurred immediately after Count Witte had jockeyed the Tsar into limiting his absolute power and convoking a representative assembly.

<sup>1</sup> So called from the word *Narod*, a nation.

<sup>2</sup> In 1905.

<sup>3</sup> Constitutional Democrats.

Entrusted with the task of governing, Witte's immediate aim was to establish on a solid basis constitutional government of a kind adapted to the nation's needs as he understood them, and he agreed with me in thinking that to give the peoples of Russia universal suffrage and parliamentary government, such as obtains in Britain, Belgium, and Italy, would be to feed a new-born child on roast beef and plum pudding. A Russian adaptation of the Prussian, or at most the German, constitution, but without universal suffrage, seemed to him to meet the case adequately. But he could not hope to carry his programme without the support of public opinion, and public opinion, as he well knew, was eager for a democratic regime to be instituted at once and was, therefore, opposed to his tenure of office on the Russian principle that no bread is preferable to half a loaf. He requested me to sound my friends, the Liberals and the Jews, and to endeavour to secure their support. I was empowered to dangle before their eyes the perspective—which was no will-o'-the-wisp—that the power which his health would not allow him to retain more than eight or ten months would immediately pass on to them and that they would thank him right cordially and deservedly then for not having thrown open the sluices to the anarchic flood misnamed democracy.

I first addressed myself to the Jews, some among whom a couple of months before had assured me that they would accept gratefully a representative chamber, even if its functions were circumscribed, provided it was a viable organism of growth. But now scarcely had I opened my mouth when I received the emphatic answer, "No. The Jews will give no support to Witte. He is not their man. He is a mere bureaucrat, and no bureaucrat can play the rôle of reformer." Thereupon I tried suasion and held up before the eyes of the Jewish leaders the prospect of a Liberal cabinet after their own heart taking over the seals of power from Witte within a twelvemonth. This outlook soothed the hearts and sweetened the words of my friends, but their message was still a refusal, only it now ended with the words, "If Witte



had made his proposal sooner—it might have met with a different reception. But now—now the Jewish cause is indissolubly bound up with the revolutionary Bund. The Jews will owe their emancipation to force, and they will see to it that the force is sufficient to burst their bonds and give them all their rights.” “And if they fail and *pogroms* recommence will the condition of the Jews be better?” I asked. “That is an unlikely supposition, in the Russia that has received the October Manifesto. Anyhow we are willing to run the risk.”

I next went to the Liberals, who afterwards became the Kadets, and made my proposals to a group including MM. Petrunkevitch and Roditcheff. The conversation moved over the same lines as when I had reasoned with the Jewish leaders, with this difference, that the Liberals were more curious and asked for greater details. They finally said, “Witte is insincere. He is a bureaucrat. He is playing for his own hand. He flatters now the Tsar and now the intelligentsia. He has no programme; if he had, you would be able to unfold it even though he might not be able to publish it. You cannot give us any details. Therefore we will not support him. Let him resign and people may believe in his sincerity.” “He will resign after the loan is floated next spring,” I said. “And if in the meanwhile you do not support him, you will then have reaction.” Never shall I forget the explosion of laughter produced by my words. “Dr. Dillon, we thought that you, at least, knew Russia well enough to grasp the fact that the days of reaction are over. Henceforth a reactionary movement in Russia is inconceivable.” “If your assumption is correct,” I retorted, “your decision is statesmanlike”: and I took my leave and went back to the Winter Palace to carry the fatal message.

Witte, when I delivered the answers, said, “I am not altogether surprised that the Jews have thrown in their lot with the revolutionary gang, but I am pained. They received provocation enough to make them impatient, but none the less they are only making bad worse. They cannot win by force because the army is on the other side. As for the Liberals they are a conceited, short-sighted, unpractical lot.

You who know the situation are aware that I cannot stand the strain of office much beyond April next, when I hope to float the biggest loan recorded in history. After that I would have retired in favour of the Liberals. But if in the meanwhile they are against me I shall be thwarted and they will not be benefited. What fools they are! They are of the same clay as the men who made away with Alexander II. on the day when he had signed the decree promulgating a constitution. As for reaction, if only they knew how the high priests of the reaction are weaving their spells and uttering their incantations in the palace even now, and how impatient the Emperor is to give them their innings, salutary fear of the reaction would, of itself, have sufficed to convert the Liberals into supporters of my cabinet. But we shall all see how their attitude works out—and then the experience will be of no avail. It is an awful tragedy!" Not only did the Kadets not support Witte's domestic policy, but a number of their adherents repaired to Paris and endeavoured to dissuade the French government from advancing the money demanded by the Russian Premier! And the Jews played the same game in Berlin. On the part of candidates for power these tactics are unintelligible to the Western mind.

In the following summer those same Liberals, who had since formed themselves into a parliamentary party under the name of "Kadets," gave further proof of their lack not only of political sense but also of practical acquaintance with the bulk of their own people. They publicly promised the land to the peasants, whetting appetites and stirring up tumultuous passions which made the country deaf to the finer vibrations of the political voice, and ended by swamping all political issues and their exponents. It was the evocation of a spirit which they were unable to lay. Again, when the first Duma was dissolved by a quaking cabinet and an irresolute Tsar who had decided to entrust the reins to the Kadets, these amazing tacticians fled to Vyborg in Finland, set the imperial decree at naught, and threatened the government with penury, confident that the nation, whom it exhorted to pay no taxes, would make good the threat at any

and every cost. But this draft on the peoples' devotion was dishonoured. Taxes were collected as successfully as before, and the main results produced by the audacious move were the elimination of the Kadets from the ranks of candidates for the government which was about to have been handed over to them and the disqualification of some of their best men for seats in the Duma.

Finally it was the Kadets and their parliamentary friends who, when the March revolution of 1917 was in progress, weakly acquiesced in the abolition of the monarchy and the extinction of the Duma, reckoning upon the self-discipline and moderation of an anarchist people which acknowledged no restraints and knew not what measure means. But they knew not what they did.

It is hardly too much to affirm that if the parliamentary parties had understood their own people better they would not have swept away the regime root and branch, dissolved the Duma, which might conceivably still have been able to keep the various Russians together, and broken up the greatest political community in Europe.

The history of the revolution of 1917 in its technical aspect is the tale of a fatal psychological error and its sequel. It was the currency of the notion that the peasant was aware of the causal nexus between his situation of inferiority in the community and the vicious system of governance under which he lived that induced in the Duma leaders the belief that the political revolution which they were shaping and circumscribing would be welcomed as a boon by the masses. In itself the change as projected by them would have been beneficial. To free the country from the parasitical bureaucracy, to restrict the power of the Tsar, establish parliamentary government, and admit the people to a share in public affairs proportionate to their mental and moral equipment were among the aims of the Duma leaders. But the whole conception, elaborated by lawyers and professors, bore the stamp of the legal rather than the psychological temper. It lost sight of the peculiar workings of the peasants' psyche and of the narrowness of their intellectual

horizon. Its authors forgot that hardly one of the institutions of the Empire, economic or political, was rooted in its essential fitness and utility, and that the function by which society can assimilate what is helpful and reject what is pernicious was long since atrophied. They had no inkling of the decisive fact that the predatory character of the State had long since been assimilated by the people who were accustomed to rob the land of its fertility and were impatient to deprive the nobles of the land.

The second error flowed from the first. It was taken for granted that the masses were self-disciplined enough to accept just what was offered them and be content with that. On this assumption, and by way of winning their support, the Duma leaders promised them the land belonging to the great landowners provided that they would wait until the Constituent Assembly should meet and lay down the conditions of expropriation and transfer. But the Bolsheviks at once outbid the Kadets, took the people into partnership with themselves, and practically offered it the situation of national parasite from which the bureaucracy had just been ousted, the only difference being that the body on which the people was to prey was that of the well-to-do section of the community. This aspect of the revolution—which has also other and nobler facets—may be aptly described as “the democratisation of parasitism which had theretofore been confined to the administration and its branches.”<sup>1</sup> A glance at the work of spoliation by beings who display no trace of conscience or moral sense, who pounce like beasts upon their prey, torturing and slaying the defenceless and the well meaning, deaf to pity and heedless of the morrow, will suffice to justify that somewhat hard definition. It is owing to the characteristics enumerated that “Russia is a poor country in spite of her riches, uncultured notwithstanding her talents, an amazing mixture of the sublime and the savage in which, however, the simply civilised element is wholly absent.”<sup>2</sup> It is a land of cultural no less than climatic extremes.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Gazette de Lausanne*, 7th January, 1918.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RUSSIAN MIND

EVER since the dawn of her history Russia has vegetated, rather than lived, apart from the main European currents—social, religious, political, and scientific—untouched by the prevailing tendencies of the times and with a decided drift of her own to political decomposition. As the democratic spirit progressed in the rest of Europe, Russia more and more resembled the iceberg floating into warm climes and thawing as it moved. Her rulers would appear to have had no clear conception of the baleful kind of international entity into which their predatory State had become, of its essential antagonism to the European community of nations, or of the utter collapse of the whole fabric that must ensue upon a serious endeavour to change its nature and bring it into line with the communities of the West. It was only by dint of circumstance and brute force that the people, naturally rebellious to social discipline, had been knit into a loose organisation which aimed not merely at protection from outside aggression but also and especially at territorial expansion, and in this way had to dispense with creating conditions favourable to the highest social life.

The most merciless, if not the most convincing, analyses of the national character have been made by Russians themselves, who are prone to morbid introspection and also to exaggeration and often indulge in self-abasement. Take, as example, the utterance of Peter the Great, "Other European peoples one can treat as human beings, but I have to do with cattle." The celebrated Tshaadayeff, who headed the reform movement in the reign of Nicholas I. and bade his countrymen look to the West for light and guidance, described Russia as a superfluous member of the body of humanity. "No great truth," he affirmed, "ever came from out of our people. We have discovered nothing, and

from all the discoveries made by other nations we have borrowed only the outward simulacrum of useful luxury.”<sup>1</sup> For these and similar opinions Tshaadayeff, the officer of the Guards, was shut up in a mad-house. It may not be amiss, therefore, to quote one of the few native psychologists who is free from those defects of self-castigation and over-statement and paints the generality of his countrymen in colours the effect of which is relatively bright. “The Russian man,” writes M. Nikitenko,<sup>2</sup> “knows neither law nor justice. His morality is the outcome of his good humour, which being neither developed nor strengthened by conscious principles, sometimes sprouts forth into an action, but is frequently swallowed up by other and more savage instincts. A Russian may steal and booze and cheat until you find it irksome to live with him. And yet in spite of it all you feel that there is something in him that captivates and draws you towards him, something good, intelligent, fraught with promise, something that raises him above the level of every German, every Frenchman, and even Englishman you ever met.”<sup>3</sup>

Now that undefined something is, I take it, the psychical undercurrent inherent in certain representatives of the race, the latent spiritual force which assimilates fleeting moods or, as mystics would say, fleeting moods to fitful memories of a pre-natal state or fleeting presentiments of a wondrous future. For the higher type of Russian, educated or illiterate, is attracted, at least speculatively, to lofty ideals, and is also capable of striving after them for a time with a superb contempt of consequence, heroically heedless of the route he traverses, but without method or perseverance. The result is often as tragi-comical as was that of the genius who with his gaze fixed on the stars tripped and fell into a boghole. The limits of the sphere of dream and waking, the bounds of true and false, the line of demarcation between the sublime and the ridiculous, pale and vanish as the fanatical Russian follows a Jack-o'-lantern into the enchanted land of fantasy.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Russian Heads*, by Dr. T. Schiemann, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> *Russian Antiquity*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Russian Antiquity*, May, 1891.

On the absurd incongruities and follies to which visionaries are led by these vain strivings to bring down the ideals of the millennium to the earth and clothe them in the garb of every-day reality it is needless to dwell. One has but to cast a glance at the horrors enacted in Petrograd and Odessa after the Maximalist revolution or, indeed, to recall certain of the other revolting exhibitions that followed that sinister outburst.

Some observers are struck with what they consider the contrast in the Russian people between the effects of historic forces on the one hand and those of racial tendencies on the other. I venture to think that these effects were largely caused by the blending of widely different races. That they exist and that Russia is the synthesis of contradictions cannot be gainsaid by those who have studied the origins of her people. "Meekness and brutality, communism and the most advanced individualism, the strongest state and the weakest political consciousness, absence of race-hatred and the most cruel pogroms, the deepest religious nature and the most abject superstition, an all-pervading democracy and the most absolute monarchy, all these contradictions and more are the result of this unique jostling of mythical antiquity and stark reality—an eternal and inextricable enigma to the Western observer."<sup>1</sup> After ages of spiritual stagnation and politico-social bondage the Russian man is still half a child and half an imperfectly tamed beast. But if he lacks culture he has a rich experience and a stoical life-philosophy enshrined in picturesque proverbs of which the basis is resignation to Fate and pity for his ill-starred fellows; his language is rich, coloured, and forcible, but his thinking lacks sequence and his reasoning logic; his action begins in hesitation, is continued with intervals of quiescence, and almost always ends before achievement. Deeds belie words, means hinder ends, indifference compensates for lack of constancy. In his dealings with his fellows the Russian often runs through the entire gamut of temperament from feminine gentleness to bestial ferocity.

<sup>1</sup> Leo Wiener, *An Interpretation of the Russian People*, p. 15.

To bring out these characteristics of the dominant race, foremost among which is a marked tendency to embroider truth and subject the call of duty to the passing mood, and to trace them to their sources was one of the objects of a book of mine<sup>1</sup> written many years ago which has since received the hall-mark of approval from the greatest Russian authority<sup>2</sup> on these questions.<sup>3</sup> I there pointed out that a careful survey of the leading elements of social life in that country must convince the unbiassed of the need of a standard of judgment wholly different from that which we are wont to apply to other European races, the Russian being still, so to say, in the gristle, not yet hardened in the bone of manhood.

By nature the Northern Slavs are richly gifted. A keen subtle understanding; surprising quickness of apprehension—a changeful temper; an inexhaustible flow of animal spirits; a rude persuasive eloquence, and a capacity for self-denial equalled only by that of the early Christian ascetics and for fiendish cruelty comparable to that of the Redskins of North America,<sup>4</sup> to which may be added an imitative

<sup>1</sup> *Russian Characteristics*, by E. B. Lanin.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Milyukoff, ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>3</sup> Leo Wiener, Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the Harvard University, in his admirable book *An Interpretation of the Russian People* (London, 1915), writes: "Several years ago I asked Professor Milyukoff, the distinguished historian of civilisation, what English book he considered the best as regards its analysis of modern Russia. Without a moment's hesitation, and with a twinkle in his eye, he answered: 'E. J. Dillon's *Russian Characteristics*.' The reply betrayed a distinct Russian attitude towards censure, for a more incisive condemnation of everything Russian could hardly be imagined, and any one other than a Russian would have blushed with shame and burned with indignation at the very mention of that brilliant Irishman's mordant attack upon his nation. But Milyukoff does not stand alone in his conviction, for although Dr. Dillon is known to Russian society and to the Government as the author of these sketches he continues to live in Petrograd as an honoured man and perfectly secure in his Avestan studies."

<sup>4</sup> The manner in which the officers were tortured in 1877 cannot even be described in Western countries. General Korovichenko in Tashkent was horribly maltreated until he was agonising. Then he was laid on the floor of his apartment and the crowd was admitted on payment of 30 copecks to enter in and spit on his face. Cf. *Le Temps*, 10th January, 1918.



faculty almost simian in range and intensity—constitute an adequate equipment for the discharge of what worldly-minded statesmen were wont to term their “heaven-sent mission to civilise the world.” But these and other gifts were blighted and turned into curses by influences—natural and artificial—that made their free exercise impossible and rendered their possessors as impersonal as the men who raised the pyramids in the desert or the builders of the coral reefs in the Pacific. The resultant is an easy-going, patient, shiftless, ignorant, unveracious, and fitfully ferocious mass whom the German writers flippantly connect by an isocultural line with the Gauchos of Paraguay.

Incapacity to gauge and maintain the proper relation in which words should stand to things lies at the root of one Russian quality hardly distinguishable from the mythopœic faculty among primitive races, but which Anglo-Saxons bluntly label unveracity. It is beyond question a trait of the Northern Russ. The masses display scant reverence for facts, refuse to acknowledge their finality, and argue as though they could be safely disregarded, nay, even altered at a pinch. Their imagination is powerful enough to fuse, recast, and readjust them to their velleities. To time, space, and causality they ascribe but a shadowy existence, and even that they often ignore in practice. Thus a whole generation of professional revolutionaries passed their time fruitlessly operating with words and doing nothing. The life of the reformer Bakunin was a continuous battle—fought with empty phrases for a mere negation.

Congruously with this mental cast the Russians are free and easy in their use of words as exponents of facts, or symbols of ideas, and set so much less value than Western peoples on assurances and promises, however solemn, that they rob praise of its worth and calumny of its sting. I shall never forget an anecdote told me many years ago by my friend the novelist, Leskoff, of an Englishman invited to Russia by Nicholas I. for the sole purpose of becoming acquainted with Gogol's story *Dead Souls*, which had not yet been translated into any foreign tongue. A nobleman

equally well at home in English and Russian was told off by the Emperor to visit the new-comer daily and translate the book orally chapter by chapter. At the farewell audience accorded to him on his departure the guest was asked by the Tsar how he relished the novel. The Briton reflected a moment and then exclaimed with an air of deep conviction, "The Russians, sire, are unconquerable." "Unconquerable?" queried the Tsar, puzzled by the seemingly irrelevant reply. "I don't quite see the nexus." "Well, your Majesty, no other people on the face of God's earth could have produced such a consummate cheat as Gogol's hero. The nation that brought him forth is sheer unconquerable."

Thus hampered alike by their qualities and their defects, the bulk of the nation—I am dealing now exclusively with the Great Russian, who represents only 48 per cent. of the population<sup>1</sup>—is obviously still unfitted to discharge the functions that devolve upon a self-governing democracy. And interest as well as duty made it incumbent on the popular leaders to give practical recognition to this decisive fact while endeavouring to modify it by educating the people. This step presupposed a high degree of moral courage; and it was never taken. One prominent man, my friend, Maxim Kovalevsky, fearlessly proclaimed the truth and garnered in unpopularity. And yet a policy of this limited scope need not have damped the reformers' ardour nor affected their ultimate aims. After all, politics is the art of the possible, and the possible is gauged by studying the material to be handled, and is attained by accepting compromises after having balanced the inconveniences. But even the educated class of the Russian population, the "intellectuals," are admittedly deficient in political sense as well as in deep-rooted concrete interests. One cannot affect surprise at this, considering their origin as a class, their status in the community, and the ruthless way in which the Tsar's government

<sup>1</sup> There are 48 per cent. Great Russians. The remaining 52 per cent. is split into three groups: (1) The White or Little Russians; (2) The non-Russian races of the Caucasus, East Russia, and Silesia; and (3) races of the West (Poles, Lithuanians, Letts, Esthnians, Finns, Swedes).

suppressed the application of individual thought and energy to all national and most international concerns. Neither is it to be wondered at that so many Russian reformers were impractical day-dreamers, willing to sacrifice the feasible good for the unattainable best, and always liable to run off at a tangent in quest of some secondary aim. Had it been otherwise, had the party chiefs, who in October, 1905, aspired to lead the Russian masses, drawn a lesson from the events of that time and borne that lesson in mind in 1917 when surveying the new situation and gauging its trend and possibilities, they would have shrunk from the destruction of their last plank of safety, the Duma, and the abolition of the Tsardom, and abstained from the acts that led up to these suicidal measures. For say what we may, the blast that destroyed the monarchy and shattered the nation came directly from the Duma leaders, semi-consciously aided and abetted by the simple-minded representatives of the Entente, whom history may come to regard as drowsy, if not sleeping, partners of the active plotters.

One can feel for the Entente powers who nobly set out to do battle for the weak and oppressed nationalities in the company of the greatest oppressor of weak nationalities the world had ever seen—the one predatory State in Europe which glutted its piratical appetites not only on foreign peoples but also on its own. It was like the shepherd's dogs taking a pack of wolves with them to look after the defenceless sheep. And the Entente governments were painfully alive to all that was ridiculous and embarrassing in their position, especially when they had been bullied into promising Constantinople to Russia and agreeing to treat the fate of Poland as a domestic Russian concern. Naturally they were impatient to see the Tsardom democratised and, ignorant of the State structure with which they were dealing, they bent its pillars and pulled down the whole fabric.

Not only were the character and defects of the predominant element of the population—the Russian race—uniformly misunderstood by the chiefs of the parliamentary party in Petrograd and their friends abroad, but the further

all-important circumstance was unheeded that there was no ethnic unity in the Empire, nor anything more politically than a loose amalgam of conflicting nationalities and mutually conflicting classes knit together by awe of imperial authority and the pressure exerted by an omnipotent bureaucracy. Internal cement there was none. For ages the souls of the many subject races had been waiting for some great crisis to fuse them in one and embody them anew in the product of a cultural blend. Some onlookers imagine that the present world-war was destined to be the Medea's cauldron that would transform or kill, but, whether this was likely or not, it behoved those politicians who imagined that they held the nation's future in their hands to eschew everything calculated to intensify the mutual aversion of the ethnic ingredients whose fusion was the preliminary condition to the formation of a homogeneous people in a united and indivisible Russia. The chiefs, however, unconscious of the danger and solicitous about their parties, suddenly removed the one force that could have kept the nationalities and classes together, whereupon these collapsed like the staves of a barrel from which the hoops have been knocked off. And their collapse was so natural, so necessary, the elements being juxtaposed as they were, that it could and should have been foreseen. One of the main objects of my articles and book written in the years 1891-93 was to prepare the public for the downfall of the Tsardom.

It is fair to say, however, that the coalescence of all Russia's peoples being neither feasible nor desirable, that of the principal culture-bearers would have sufficed. Slav and Turk, German and Calmuck, Jew and Mongol, Tunguz and Georgian, Armenian and Bashkir, display physiological and psychological differences so vast that the resultant of assimilation must be in every respect unsound. In all such cases the moral grade is lowered, for great racial divergences in the elements of an ethnic blend necessarily beget degeneration. In a ruling or self-governing race it is basic character that regulates the morality of the community, shapes its destinies, determines its place in the world. Consequently

history is at bottom the manifestation of national character rather than of average intelligence, the working of the moral bent much more than of the intellectual gifts and attainments of the people. And under normal conditions neither in the race nor in the individual is character liable to change. It is my belief, however, that an exception is made by the character of the Russian which is marked by variability. Soft, receptive, and pliant it lacks grit and backbone. In initiative, self-mastery, and staying power the individual is sadly deficient and the people have less than an average nation's share of cohesiveness. To use a picturesque American expression they are not "self-winders." Indeed, one might aptly term Russia "the boneless man of Europe."

Of all the individual and, therefore, also racial traits of the Northern Slav the most noteworthy to my thinking, and one to which I have never seen any allusion in books or articles, is precisely this variability of character. I mention this peculiarity only after long years of observation and merely as a surmise which still needs verification. Impressibility to certain classes of motive and corresponding indifference to others constitute the woof and warp of human character, and character—the bedrock of personality—is deemed to be almost as unchangeable as the inherent properties of things. It may sound rash, therefore, to affirm that the Russian differs from other Europeans in the inconstancy of his impressibility to a given class of motive in its liability to vary in response to inner and outer influences which generally elude analysis. But to my thinking the facts warrant the assumption. And for this reason the most careful estimates of what a Russian will do under a given set of circumstances, even though his antecedents be known and examples of his past conduct be there to guide one, cannot be taken as trustworthy and are often belied by the event.

When during a critical stage in the process of racial amalgamation a politico-social upheaval brings turbulent chaos in its train, as in the year 1917, the danger is indeed formidable. It is then touch and go with the inchoate nation. The ethnic elements either combine definitely, forming a

*tertium quid* as did the heterogeneous races of France, or else repel each other violently as do the nationalities of Austria. The former result was rapidly brought about by the French Revolution which smoothed away the jarring traits of Picards and Normans, Bretons and Provençals, Flemings and Basques, producing a one-souled, united French people. The latter consummation is now making headway in Russia, whose Germans, Jews, Finns, Tartars, Mongols, Armenians, Georgians, scornfully refuse to commingle with, and lose themselves in, the passive unassimilating Slav. Their racial and political differences are accentuated as never before, the general tendency is centrifugal, and the desire for union, where union until recently seemed possible, is weakened or gone.

But a still worse calamity threatens the inhabitants of the new republic. Baleful though a revolution may be, it does not necessarily involve the ruin of a country. Indeed, it very often clears the way for a fresh period of evolution under the sway of a new idea. National upheavals generally coincide with the spiritual seed-time of which later generations reap the harvest. In Russia's case, however, the germs of a new order are as yet nowhere visible. Far from this, the loosening of all social and other bonds is the inevitable if not the wished-for goal. No positive idea has been propounded, no constructive effort put forth by any one there. Dogmas on which a section of the nation has been living for ages are now thrust aside as antiquated prejudices and their negatives are gaining a temporary hold over the minds of earnest and hot-headed men. But only their negatives. It is not as though new, untried ideas were sprouting up, from which in time good fruit might reasonably be expected. The barren denial of old ones is judged sufficient, as though mere negatives could serve as the groundwork of a vast social and political structure. The attempted realisation of these negations is now turning the country upside down and inside out; and there is reason to fear that the one practical outcome will be a superfluous and catastrophic demonstration that a mere negation is not a constructive force.

Since March, 1917, the sole effect of these solvents has been to produce that anarchic decomposition the germs of which were inherent in the Tsardom ever since its birth. In lieu of an ideal heaven to raise and lighten the inert lump, we descry only powerful explosives capable of shattering it. The leading classes had long since forsaken the old tenets, religious and political, and their example contributes to undermine the unreasoning faith of the common people, whose selfish savage instincts superstition or force had so often checked without transforming. Crude notions of an anthropomorphic God and of an apotheosised Tsar continued to be the Hercules' Pillars beyond which the benighted peasant seldom ventured before his emancipation by Alexander II. They marked the end of his world of ideas—the Chinese wall that shut in his horizon. But after that reform they imperceptibly began to lose their significance as moral or political boundaries. In September, 1917, I wrote: "Now that the Tsar is thrust aside and Russia's gods are dead or dying, it is become manifest that there is no more powerful solvent of human communities than the dust of dead divinities. Bestial passions, formerly subdued by ascetic self-restraint or physical fear, are now unleashed; all deterrents are gone since that of capital punishment was abolished, and for the time being anarchy is supreme. The nation is suffering from *delirium tremens*. If Russia has not yet touched bottom in the Slough of Despond her frenzied chiefs may yet sink her deeper. Her revolutionary leaders have no longer a living faith in the principles that lie at the roots of civilised community life, and without the faith which justifies hope even nations cannot be saved."

What part, one may fairly ask, had all those unheeded traits of the Russian people in bringing about the March revolution, and what were its more proximate causes? When and why did the minds of the people first begin to ferment and effervesce, and who was responsible for under-estimating the intensity of the fever and doing nothing to allay it? Does the movement which has culminated in the overthrow of the Tsardom and the disruption of the State involve the

utter ruin of both, or is it only one of those violent breaks in the continuous development of a community which mark the close of an epoch of decadence and the opening of an era of fresh vitality and energy? Are the proletarian republics ruled by Lenin, Trotzky, and the more obscure administrators the types of State best adapted to the new cultural plane in which humanity is about to enter after the great world war? To suggest tentative answers to these questions is the main object of the following pages.

The simplest and most reasonable account of the matter would seem to be that a number of widely different causes, racial, political, religious, and others, combined to form both the ethnic clay and the political mould, the material and the instrument, for the work of the fashioning potter, and the finished product could not possibly live in the democratic environment of to-day. Now so far as I know the part attributable to the inborn predispositions of the people has in no previous analysis been clearly stated, nor even the influence of institutions on their leanings, ideals, and moral temper. The lightning-flare of the revolution by revealing the ex-subjects of the Tsar in an unfamiliar, not to say repellent, aspect has whetted curiosity as to the sources whence the race drew its social life-current. And I have long believed that the best materials for a satisfactory answer to this question might be found in a study of its racial origins and transmitted tendencies.

When assigning to political institutions their part in bringing about the great national crisis, native and foreign writers are wont to lay all the stress on the practical abuses of the administration which in the last two reigns were in truth not only at odds with the spirit of the age but almost absolutely unbearable. I venture to go further and maintain that not merely the human instruments but the system itself was vicious, and that it was easy to see that the administration at its best, when public servants were, not indeed more honest, but less recklessly dishonest, when the problems confronting them were fewer and simpler, and when control by the central government was easier, was rooted in con-



ceptions which rendered its maintenance in an enlightened community of nations sheer impossible. For Russia never ceased to be what its founders had made it, a predatory State without, like Prussia, and a predatory State within, unlike any other out of Asia. All its internal arrangements were adjusted to foreign conquest, which lent to its policy a steadfastness and uniformity that were currently attributed to the fixity of a grandiose Machiavellian scheme. The internal ordering of the country, the suppression of free speech, the prohibition of education, the racking of the peasantry, and the persecution of religious nonconformity were more or less effective means to the unchanging end. To have purified such a system from the abuses introduced by personal negligence, greed, or depravity would, therefore, not have altered its trend nor saved the country from the disaster towards which it was steadily wending.

It is impossible to approach the ethnic enigma with any sense of reality without allowing largely for the circumstance that the Russians, far from being pure Slavs, absorbed the various indigenous races, mostly Finnish nomads, whom they found in the land between the Upper Volga and the Oka. And the descendants of these various and disparate elements inherited many of the salient intellectual and moral as well as physical traits of the lower races, their lack of social cohesiveness, their leanings towards anarchism—their restlessness, intellectual and physical, displayed in biting criticism of all social and political arrangements and by an irresistible passion for roaming. The Russian is a born critic and satirist. An illiterate peasant from the remote and uncultured provinces who drives a public conveyance will turn to his fare and in picturesque, richly-coloured phrases utter severe strictures on everything that is. To him nothing is sacred. Again, a lad from a squalid hamlet will pass through the school and university into the civil service, and in the course of his career be sent from Ryazan to Samarkand, from Odessa to Archangel, thus moving thousands of miles about the country, yet he never thinks of going back to end his days in his native village. In this and most other things he

offers a striking contrast to the Teuton who is hierarchical, attached to his birthplace, imbued with a sense of measure, and contented with the relative bliss of domesticity.

The Russian is never settled; he is so frequently stung with the mania for travelling that it seems to be the call of the blood. He will sometimes rise up suddenly, start off as if in response to a mystic impulse, and wander for days or months or years. The lower orders are oftener possessed by this overmastering passion than their superiors. They are constantly changing their places of abode. It was for their benefit that merely nominal charges were fixed for such long journeys as that from Petersburg to Vladivostok or to Kharbin. And when they had not the wherewithal to buy even these cheap tickets, they would bribe the conductor with sixpence or a shilling to let them travel for nothing and to hide under the seat when the controller came around. Thousands of them flit from western Russia to eastern Siberia, others pilgrimage to Jerusalem and back again to their respective hamlets, then after an interval of rest they trudge to Kieff, afterwards to the Sviatya Gory, next to the northern shrines, and so on they keep roving until they lie down and die. Sectarians scour the country in every direction, preaching, teaching, proselytising. One sect has a rigid rule forbidding its members to tarry longer than three days in one place. I met one of those fanatics at the holy shrine Sviatya Gory many years ago and he explained to me how his co-religionists arranged to be together and to meet from time to time. For eight years he himself had never sojourned longer than three days anywhere. A well-to-do Russian whose sons were grown up would often distribute his property among his children, take a wallet and a staff, and spend the remainder of his days pilgrimaging from shrine to shrine.

Nomads are not usually builders; they usually prey on those who are. Like the Kurdish mountaineers among whom I sojourned several years ago, listening to their tales of predatory expeditions against the Armenian husbandmen, they pillage and destroy. Love of destruction is ingrained; only

generations can expel it from the blood. This also is a moral twist that often breaks through in the Russian. Take the merchants, for example, who formed the most conservative class in the Tsardom.<sup>1</sup> When a merchant and his friends went out to drink, he would kick over the traces. His idea of amusement was to smash the costly mirrors in hotels and restaurants, to break the furniture, to maul the waiters or the proprietor, and to ask that these items be included in the bill. The peasants dance and skip for joy when they can pillage, demolish, burn. Whenever the police relaxed their hold, they delighted in breaking into manors, smashing the furniture, cutting the pictures into shreds, burning the houses. In the pogroms against the Jews the same passion for destruction overmastered and goaded them to crimes against property and the person. "We must destroy all the imperial institutions, pulverise them, leave nothing standing," exclaimed a revolutionist, whose parents were nobles, to me. "And what will you put in the place of what you destroy?" I queried. "Nothing yet—that is until we think it out. But that will come in time." In 1905-6 as in 1917 the main achievement of the revolutionists was destruction. And what fiendish joy they displayed in 1905-6 in roasting men alive, or setting them barefoot on sheets of hot iron! And in 1917. . . .

<sup>1</sup> They were fast losing this conservatism in the cities and towns before the war.

## CHAPTER III

### LACK OF RUSSIAN UNITY

It is well to remember that the anarchist bias inherent in the Russian race has never been uprooted nor even systematically countered. The bulk of the people are hardly any better equipped for the life-struggle than they were in the days when the Mongols of the Golden Horde held sway among them and compelled their princes to lick horses' slaver.

One of the most powerful engines for preparing, maturing, and consummating the politico-social cataclysm was the university, together with the numerous tag-rag and bobtail of loosely-thinking, wildly-speaking humanity that centred around it. I had the honour to be a member of one of the foremost Russian universities and observed this puissant influence at close quarters. The university is essentially a western institution specially adapted to the requirements of western youth reared according to certain traditions and indoctrinated with certain beliefs. Transplanted to Russian soil the university brought forth unfamiliar—Dead Sea—fruit. And it could not well be otherwise. The Russian student was at bottom one of those peasants whose qualities and defects I have just been endeavouring to outline. Endowed with marvellous receptivity, a hypercritical cast of mind, impatience to learn everything, combined with insuperable sloth and infirmity of purpose, he was filled with awe for science, took for granted western theories, principles, and ideas, and applied them as standards of comparison to the institutions and doctrines of his own country. Capable of a passion for the abstract he worshipped western science, or rather pseudo-science which he understood more easily, as a tribesman on the shores of Lake Baikal worships his fetish. For synthesis, for constructive work, he lacked the materials, the training, and the capacity.

These young men, most of whom never completed the high-school curriculum, were turned loose upon the country to sow seeds of discontent and rebellion whithersoever they went. Looking around him the student perceived the vast contrast between the western principles which he revered as dogmas and those that underlay the odious ordering of things in the Tsardom. And his soul revolted. In economics no law was respected. There was no consideration for the peasantry on whom the dead weight of the Empire pressed. The masses were kept not only without political rights but in utter ignorance of the circumstance that they had any claim to them. And the embargo was issued with wanton cynicism. The peasantry was no more than a wealth-creating machine for the behoof of the ruling class, and the rulers took so little thought even of their own less pressing interests that they failed to keep the machine properly lubricated or in smoothly working condition. And everywhere the same piratical instincts of the autocracy and its instruments met the eye. When the student, who was himself a peasant and whose father and uncles and brothers were still on the land, had assimilated the doctrines of the west and transmuted them into a religious creed, his feelings towards the men and the institutions that had systematically violated them for centuries and had ground his own class in the dust were those of the religious fanatic who would fain condemn heresiarchs even on earth to the unimaginable tortures of eternal damnation. Nothing that the autocracy or its confederate, the bureaucracy, did was in his eyes other than a heinous sin. The administration was constitutionally incapable of a noble, a praiseworthy, or even a morally indifferent act.

That combination of the eastern political system with the scientific ideas and progressive principles of the west, working upon the Russian mind with its peculiar bent, produced the revolutionary spirit as inevitably as the mixing in certain proportions of charcoal, sulphur, and saltpetre produces gunpowder.

The intelligentsia had no roots in the people. Its members

were severed and sundered from it, but they resembled one of those preaching orders which were founded in the Middle Ages whose energy and success largely depended on their complete detachment from every class and concrete interest. The scraps of western theories and systems which they scattered broadcast over Russia about "the rights of man," the origins of autocracy, the only true basis of human society, the necessity of liberty of conscience as a correlate of personal responsibility, and other matters were totally ignored by the peasant and the merchant classes, but became a source of inspiration to individuals among them and served with frequent modifications as the revolutionary creed. The intelligentsia was the order from which two mutually hostile bodies were recruited, the apostles of revolution and the leavening elements of the bureaucracy. It was the intelligentsia who sowed the revolutionary seed and watered it. It was from their midst that schoolmasters and professors, physicians, men of letters, publicists, lawyers, were taken, most of whom contributed something to the general ferment. It was especially the publicists, journalists, and literary men who did most of the spade work and sowed the seed which at last sprang up in the shape of armed men. They dealt in abstractions, operated with western theories, transplanted fragments of Hegel, Marx, Kautsky, Mill, Buckle, to Russian soil and pushed each proposition to the Ultima Thule of its consequences. Although they belonged to different schools of thought they united for purposes of destruction. The Kadets, who deserved their reputation of being the best organised party in the Empire, had no firm hold on the nation because they were not of it; they could not place themselves at its angle of vision, were incapable of appreciating its world philosophy, were not rooted in the people. Hence they did not enlist the peasant or the working man in their party and stood only for themselves. When the tillers of the soil and the factory hands had each formed its own organisation, then the Kadets took them as allies. But an alliance may be abandoned at any moment, especially in Russia.

The dissolution of the Russian Empire may unmistakably be traced back to the shape definitely given to the Tsardom by its two eminent founders, Ivan and Peter. Its character, internal and external, was incompatible with its survival into a democratic era of European development. For internally it was a growing realm with serfdom for its groundwork, and even after the emancipation of the serfs it still remained in spirit what it so long had been in fact. The bulk of the population toiled and moiled for the privileged few and was treated as an inferior race, and was hindered systematically from rising as a class to the level of its rulers in any sphere. Externally it was a predatory society which looked for its present well-being and future prosperity to the triumph of force, and bent all its energies to the transformation of its resources into instruments of offence and defence. In a word the development of the Tsardom postulated a state of warfare with its neighbours and a condition of chronic artificial inequality among its own peoples, and all its arrangements, financial, economic, military, and political, were carefully accommodated to those two aspects. This was nothing new to the people who between the years 1228 and 1462 had waged ninety civil wars and a hundred and fifty-eight foreign campaigns.

Roughly speaking there are two main types of States which one may distinguish by the names European and Asiatic. The former may be said to concentrate its energies upon the ordering of domestic affairs for the behoof of the community. It creates efficient machinery for the purpose of maintaining order and insuring the safety of the person and of property, translates the customs formed by necessity, expediency, or taste into laws and institutions, and has for its real, as well as its ostensible, aim the general progress of the whole people. The Asiatic State on the other hand, solicitous chiefly about foreign wars and international relations, takes little thought about the internal arrangements of the nation, the training of upright administrators, the adjustment of institutions to the temper of the people and to the permanent conditions that govern their develop-

ment, and scorns to economise labour by distributing rôles and setting up appropriate organs to harmonise order and progress. Assuming that the international community lives and will continue to live in a state of latent or open war, one of its main objects is to conquer foreign territory and to exploit foreign peoples and countries. In essence this is the idea of Hohenzollern rule, but without its redeeming features of just administration, national education, and State encouragement to commerce, industry, literature, and art. It was in accordance with this simplicist conception that the Mongols of the Golden Horde, having subjected Russia, left things there just as it had found them, spending no thought on assimilation or denationalisation, contented with imposing a tribute on the defeated people and making the native prince their chief collector of that annual impost. The Turks in like manner when they annexed the territory they now occupy made no systematic endeavour to denationalise the natives or exercise permanent control over domestic affairs. In all such matters the people enjoyed a large measure of liberty and their conquerors exploited them economically. And the Russian State was modelled on the Asiatic.<sup>1</sup>

This had not always been the case. The first beginnings of the political community in Russia—during the eleventh and twelfth centuries when the tribes were homogeneous and purely Slavs—took place on European lines, and the Grand Dukes of Kieff were admitted into the family of the eastern emperors and the western kings. But in time Kieff<sup>2</sup> having been captured and destroyed the inhabitants of the Dnieper valley migrated to the north-east, intermarried with the Finnish nomads of the country between the Upper Volga and the Oka, and the resultant of the blend was the hybrid Great Russian race. To this day their characteristics are still imperfectly understood. It is not sufficiently borne

<sup>1</sup> Shtshedrin's satirical sketches throw a flood of light on the predatory nature of the Tsardom, and in particular one satire entitled *The Tashkentians*.

<sup>2</sup> In the year 1240.



in mind that the Finns whom these Slavs from the south assimilated were nomads and what I should like to term a-political, that is, they evinced no desire or ability to form themselves into compact communities viable and self-defensive. At any rate one hears nothing of any states formed by them on the Volga. Personal interests, family feuds, fighting, hunting, trekking, and singing the legendary feats of great warriors and magicians would appear to have called forth and absorbed their energies. This impression is not materially altered by what we know of the development of the Finns in the one political society to which they have given their name. It is true that the principality of Finland was governed first by the Swedes and then by the Russians, and is only now become independent, and this condition of subjection may partly account for the fact that they left to the Swedes the task of carrying social and political progress a stage further. This spiritual leadership of the Scandinavian continued unbroken throughout the Russian domination.

The Tsar's rule over the principality was at first Asiatic in type in the sense that it abandoned to the people themselves the work and responsibility of administering their own affairs. But of the two races in the country only the Scandinavians bestirred themselves to some purpose. It was they who acted as cultural seed-bearers from the west to the north-east. When the Finnish nationalist movement started, some of the leading Swedes, in order to get more elbow-room for action, changed their Scandinavian names into Finnish equivalents as the Jews and the Germans do in Hungary, but the ethnic leaven still remained the same. Many years ago I had a long talk on this subject with the one statesman Finland produced, Mechelin, and he listened with interest, and I think I may add with acquiescence, to this view of the matter which I put before him in outline. Once the real Finnish democracy took or received freedom of action, after the fall of the Tsardom, any stirring of sound political sense or of organising capacity that may have been felt among the Finnish elements of the republic were lost

in the welter of anarchy that ensued. The great war put the political aptitudes of peoples and regimes to a severe test, and the surprises that have followed the ordeal are, to put it mildly, humiliating. It looks as though certain European peoples are constitutionally averse to social collectivity, and that force alone can keep them together.

It was with these a-political, nomadic Finnish tribes, then, that the Slav wanderers from the south intermarried, and it was from them that the new Russian people, which can hardly since then be regarded as Slav,<sup>1</sup> inherited some of their more striking traits. The invasion of the Tartars, who kept the country in subjection for two centuries, also made a noteworthy contribution to the influences that moulded the Russian people. It is true that the Khans who lived and ruled at a distance never meddled in the home concerns of their vassals, contenting themselves with a yearly tribute. But they left permanent representatives, listened to complaints made by one Russian prince against another, and encouraged secret intrigues. It was during this long servitude that the people became past masters in guile, trickery, intrigue, bribery, and all the tactics of the weak who have to defend themselves against the strong. It was during this period that the Moscow princes familiarised themselves with the Tartar type of State and imbibed its spirit of conquest without, its scorn for a living elastic organisation within to preside over and shape general progress on pacific lines. And Ivan III. embodied these exotic ideas in the simple kind of community which he established. He beheaded all the Boyars who were obnoxious to him, broke the power of the class as a factor in the realm, incited one set of his subjects to decimate another, and confronted the benighted population with an absolute monarch whose behests and whims were carried out by a body of soldiers—*opritchina*—who shed the blood of proscribed individuals at the tyrant's nod.

Bound by oath to carry out all the monarch's commands the *opritchniki* were an agency apart, whose interests were different from, nay, contrary to, those of the population.

<sup>1</sup>The White Russians are undoubtedly pure Slavs.

That aloofness is expressed by the very name *opritchina*.<sup>1</sup> And that extra-national force contained the germs of the formidable army established later by Peter the Great, and also of the bureaucracy which this emperor modelled on his army. These are the institutions which imparted to the Russian State that peculiar character which has been unfolding itself to the eyes of a wondering Europe ever since. Even after the triumph of the Bolsheviki, whose doctrine is international pacifism, the relations of the State to the population remained what it had been under the Tsars, and Ivan's *opritchniki* were represented by Lenin's Red Guards.

Peter was unquestionably a political genius, but the material in which he worked, the mould fashioned by his predecessors, the pressure of foreign wars and internal troubles, and the manner of life he led made it impossible for him to delve deep enough into the political soil to lay the foundation of a new structure. He found the Asiatic type of State ready to his hand as it had been handed down by his predecessors, and he set himself to accommodate it to the changed requirements. That was all. Thus he perceived the necessity of a fleet and of a well-trained army and he provided both. He also grasped the need of a body of public servants who should keep the army and navy provided with necessities and should conduct the general business of the nation. And for his model he chose the most efficient bureaucracy of Europe—that of Prussia. But the predatory nature of Peter's Tsardom cannot be disputed. He equipped it with new and temporarily effective organs, strove to modernise its administration, and brought it formally into line with its neighbours. But he left the essence of the old Asiatic State intact. Peter's way of grafting the new bureaucratic institution on the State resembled that of the Slavs of Novgorod who in the ninth century despatched an embassy to the Varangers inviting them to come and put things in order and rule in Russia. Peter likewise turned to the west, employed foreigners wherever he could, and in

<sup>1</sup> *Opritchnik* means an outsider, an outlaw, one who keeps or is kept aloof.

particular favoured Germans whose capacity for organisation he appreciated.

From those days onward, the Germans played a pre-dominant part in the Russian civil administration, in the army and navy, at the court, in schools and universities, in science and letters, in journalism, in trade and industry, everywhere, in a word, except in the Church. They have often been accused of acquiring the defects of the Russians and of contributing to demoralise these. It is true that like the Russians they did not scruple to cheat the treasury when opportunity offered, but justice compels one to add that they had at least a certain sense of measure which the Russian bureaucrat too often lacked. They sometimes appropriated funds, but generally limited the sums to their actual needs instead of making them commensurate with their grandiose opportunities. They served their Russian sovereign loyally, favoured men of their own race and religion, and stamped a Teuton impress on most things in the Tsardom. In the army, in the navy, in the administration of provinces, in the central ministries, in the schools and universities, on the estates of the great landowners, at the head of factories, on the boards of companies and banks, in apothecaries' shops and bakeries—were Germans. Whithersoever you went the majority of the men who transacted Russia's business, public and private, had German manners, spoke the German tongue; one must also confess that on the whole they did not disappoint the expectations of the Tsars who favoured and protected them.

Alexander III. was not of this number. From the line followed by his predecessors he swerved perceptibly. He entertained a dislike for the Teutons and, indeed, for all foreigners. For he was a nationalist and held that orthodoxy, pan-slavism, and autocracy constitute the trinity, belief in which would one day raise the Russian people to the highest pinnacle of glory, and that no foreigner could worship at its shrine. Hence he withdrew many of the privileges theretofore enjoyed by his German and other non-Russian subjects. It has been alleged that his excellent intentions

led to disastrous results, that the Russification of the national services was far from being a benefit, was, in fact, a serious disadvantage, not only to the civil administration, but also to the army and the navy. This contention has been so lately put forward that the materials for dealing with it decisively are not yet available.

Thus the builders of the State, famous and obscure, stamped the Tsardom with the impress of Asia, infused into the organism they were forming a predatory soul, and accustomed it to look for honour, glory, and even the satisfaction of growing economic needs to territorial expansion at the cost of its neighbours. They poured around those who thought, spoke, and acted for the community an atmosphere that warped their judgment and obscured all issues alien to the only kind of progress which they were capable of appreciating. The standards by which they gauged international and national situations and crises, and the principles by which they shaped their foreign relations, were adjusted to the ideals set before the community at its origin. This direction, long ago imposed upon the main current of national life, continued down to the reign of Alexander I. when for the first time it was slightly checked by economic forces pressing upon the population at home and cutting the tether which had fastened the peasants to the soil. But the spirit persisted even then, and the Slavophil party with Aksakoff at its head, which gradually drove Alexander's pacific government into war with Turkey, was undoubtedly the true exponent of "Russia's" aspirations. For the political community under the Tsar, like that of Athens or Sparta in the days of Plato or Pausanias, was restricted to the privileged minority of the population, and extended only to a fraction of these. In these circumstances every one of Russia's public men gifted with real vision, whose political energies were suffused with the "national" spirit, took refuge from insoluble internal problems in venturesome foreign enterprises. That was the mainspring of Plehve's eagerness to launch out into a war against Japan, and of Sazonoff's reluctance to allow Austria-Hungary to elbow his

country out of the Balkan Peninsula, of Pobiedonostseff's curtailment of religious liberty, of the educational limitations introduced by Tolstoy, of Vyshnegradsky's exploitation of the peasantry, of the financial system based on the inebriety of the people. The policy of all these statesmen, however opposed it might seem to reason, stood rooted in the deepest sentiment of the articulate community and harmonised with the spirit infused into it by its celebrated founders. The almost unflinching persistence of the different governments in this predatory line of action suggested to foreign observers two absurd legends, one respecting the deep and far-reaching vision of Russian statesmanship deliberately concentrating its attention and its energies upon a remote aim, and the other respecting an imaginary testament of Peter the Great enjoining on his successors the steady expansion of the Empire at the cost of its weaker neighbours. In truth the ministers who transacted Russia's foreign business from Peter's death down to the deposition of Nicholas II. were, with the sole exception of Witte, very humdrum bureaucrats who themselves were borne along on the unseen current that moved beneath the surface of events. This a-moral system, which differed considerably for the worse from the Prussian, had one vulnerable point through which the Tsardom was bound to be hit mortally in the course of time and most automatically by the mere progress of European civilisation. The ethnic fragments and the Russian classes and masses instead of being fused were, as we saw, very loosely bound together with military withes by the State. Cut these withes and the seemingly compact bundle falls to pieces. And the adoption of western institutions would necessarily sever these ties and break up the Empire. That was the ever-present danger which waxed more and more imminent and menacing as time went on and the joists and girders of the days of yore showed signs of giving way. Some of the rulers perceived it clearly; others felt it instinctively. A few were for borrowing props and supports from the west; others for fortifying the ancient structure congruously with the style of architecture in which it was

built. But the fatal outcome of these alternating expedients was discernible, was in fact perceived by Witte, the one commanding statesman possessed by Russia since the days of Peter.

Autocracy was as much a religion as a political system. Rooted in theocracy it claimed to regulate life as a whole, taking in every one of its needs and faculties. Therefore, it held together and could not be divided into political, economic, and religious parts. To swerve from it in one particular was to break with all. This master fact was at the root of Pobiedonostseff's policy. None the less Alexander I. was at one time prepared to introduce liberal institutions on the advice of his minister Speransky. But later on more logical spirits like Pobiedonostseff and his fellow workers would fain have it fenced in by coercive legislation. To them it was evident that so long as the bureaucracy ruled there was no room in the country for any other influential institution. Moreover, any liberal institutions accorded to the nation would constitute an irresistible lever in the hands of the non-Russian nationalities, such as the Poles, the Germans, the Lithuanians, the Finns, whose culture was superior to that of the ruling race. On the other hand pressure of all kinds was rendering a modernisation of the State a necessity. Between Scylla and Charybdis a middle course, proposed years before by the eminent Moscow journalist Katkoff, was struck out and certain western institutions were accorded to the population of central Russia but refused to the more advanced inhabitants of the borders. Nay more, many of the rights which these had theretofore enjoyed were withdrawn from them. This sorry pettifogging merely served to disclose the straits to which the autocracy was reduced.

The first Alexander's innovations were symptomatic rather than real, and their visible sign was the Council of the Empire—a legislative body appointed by the Tsar to study, recommend, and draft bills which the monarch vetoed or ratified at will. It was the substitute devised at the eleventh hour for a legislative chamber which the Tsar had con-

templated introducing. His successor, Nicholas I., felt the urge of economic needs and might, had he lived, been forced to set the serfs at liberty as a mere matter of material interest, but the reform was reserved for Alexander II. As soon as this potentate had emancipated the serfs, as the first of a series of reform measures, the inevitable happened: autocracy as represented by the central authorities lost its grasp of the reins of power which fell into the hands of a myriad of obscure and irresponsible individuals throughout the Empire, and the framework of the State became top-heavy.

That courageous act let loose a number of ethnic forces by which in time a new Russia or rather several new Russias were imperceptibly fashioned. The nuclei of the new entities were formed by the freed peasants, their ecstatic worshippers among the "intellectuals," and by the non-Russian nationalities who eagerly joined in the subdued agitation against an obsolete and oppressive regime. In the ensuing semi-articulate demand for the abolition of the autocracy—though not perhaps for all that it connoted—progressive Russians were at one with Poles, Jews, Armenians, and Moslems. The German element alone continued to do battle for Tsarism.

The relief accorded to the serfs made one far-reaching change in the administrative machinery: it removed the great landed proprietors, the nobility, from the position they had occupied theretofore in their collective capacities as intermediaries between the central government and the masses. That displacement called for a corrective, as otherwise the power once vested in the head departments would be scattered all over Russia and dissociated from responsibility. In the minds of Alexander II. and his principal advisers the correlate of his great reform was the extension of the powers of the newly created zemstvos, the forging of an organic link between them and the ancient institutions, and the creation of political representation. My former colleague and friend, Professor Maxim Kovalevsky, held that if those intentions had been carried out the Russian



mediæval State "would have been transformed" into one that harmonised with the requirements of modern civilisation. Perhaps it would, but only, I venture to hold, as a preliminary to the break-up of Russia. Kovalevsky himself admitted that the people of Russia were not ripe for such reforms as direct, equal, and universal suffrage. If then it had been established the State would have been dismembered by the centrifugal force of its nationalities which constituted 52 per cent. of the total population, whereas if it were withheld the effort to wrest it from the Government would have provoked coercion and revolution. Moreover, the bureaucracy was the backbone of the Russian State, and it brooked the creation of no institutions that could impair its influence or diminish its prestige. No one who saw deeply into the spirit of the Tsardom at any epoch of its existence could fail to perceive how difficult and dangerous it would have been to tackle the work of transforming it congruously with modern requirements. Witte might possibly have succeeded if he had been given a free hand, ample time, and especially if he had been allowed to begin under the reign of Alexander III.

The reform movement that now began was discreet and timorous by compulsion, but aggressive and intolerant wherever it had scope. It claimed the allegiance of every member of the intelligentsia in every walk of life and punished non-conformity wherever it manifested itself, not only in politics, but in literature, science, and art whither politics had to take refuge from persecution. He who was not with the Liberals was against them, and chastised accordingly. Some of the consequences of this absolutism were incongruous. A Congress of Physicians seriously declared in 1905 that medical men could not properly attend to their professional duties so long as the power of the autocrat was not limited. A municipality passed a resolution to the effect that the high mortality in southern Russia was a direct and inevitable result of the antiquated form of government. A congress of elementary school teachers laid it down that to teach reading and writing with success to

children was, and would continue to be, impossible until absolute government was abolished. On the other hand some of the men who earnestly desired to prolong the days of the Russian Empire, to revive its waning strength, to keep its ethnic elements and disparate classes together, turned to foreign battlefields in search of territorial expansion and distraction. Aksakoff, Pobiedonostseff, Plehve, Sazonoff, were all true representatives of Holy Russia. That instinct came from the deepest spirit of the men who had built up the Tsardom.

Witte's statesmanship differed widely from theirs. It may be described as a systematic endeavour to conciliate and satisfy the two tendencies, the democratisation of the regime and expansion abroad. Hence it was essentially synthetic. I think I am fairly interpreting my friend's central idea by likening it to that of Frederic when he proceeded to make Prussia thoroughly independent without and well compacted and united within. Witte himself never used any such ambitious comparison even when thinking aloud in my presence, but the likeness disengages itself automatically from much that he did say. In his confidential talks with me he often emphasised the remarkable fact that Russia occupied a place in the hierarchy of nations to which her specific gravity nowise entitled her. And if ever the discovery were made by the Kaiser, he added, its consequences might be calamitous. The Tsardom was weak, disunited, ready to explode into tiny fragments, and a campaign, especially against a power like Germany, would reveal this condition very quickly. Therefore it must be shunned—all wars must be shunned because of that fatal revelation to which they would lead. Russia's economic needs in the East could be provided for by pacific penetration and railway building, and her requirements in the West might best be supplied by a coalition with Germany, Austria, and France. Those being the great land powers, their interests could be made to run fairly parallel with each other, whereas those of Great Britain were often peculiar to herself alone. Still the object of the league would not be

war but a stable peace and no territorial changes were contemplated.

In the meantime he would have set about changing the domestic regime as radically as appeared feasible without provoking violent reactions.

Witte's method consisted of a series of economic, social, and political changes gradually adopted. For one thing he would have educated the entire people and endeavoured to qualify the State, or a department of it, to discharge the function of social direction. Why, he asked, were the Germans so much superior to their neighbours in general and technical education? Because of the solicitude of their rulers? Were their rulers distinguished from those of other people by their moral ideals? Nowise. But they had clearer vision, greater initiative, and were possessed of faith in the dogma that the destinies, if not the character, of men are modifiable without end by education, instruction, and social direction. He himself caused technical schools and colleges to be opened and endowed whenever and wherever it was possible.

Witte grasped the master fact that the emancipation of the serfs was the liberation of an elemental force which like fire or water must be kept under control if it is not to become destructive. He knew that it would entail a sequence of fateful innovations which according to the form imparted to them by the legislator might make or mar the Empire. He was eager, therefore, to produce a set of conditions, economic and political, in which the newly qualified elements of the community could grow and equip themselves morally and intellectually for the leading part they would one day be called on to play in Russia and perhaps in Europe. And he desired that the central authorities should be dispensed from the barren task of entering into the details of local needs. To say to the myriads of freed men as did Pobiedonostseff, Dmitry, Tolstoy, and Plehve, "Thus far and no further," smacked of the spells employed by the Boxers in China to prevent bullets from entering their bodies. The State must turn over a new leaf. Education was become a manifest necessity; it had been discouraged, penalised.

Political enfranchisement was a corollary of emancipation from serfdom. The press had been forbidden to discuss it. The initiation of the peasants into the duties of citizenship, into collective work carried on under personal responsibility, was a preliminary condition of national progress, but even to moot such an innovation has been punished as treason. At the very least freedom in the choice of means by which the emancipated millions might wish to satisfy their consciences and save their souls was a postulate of healthy, moral development, but not only was it persistently withheld from the *mooshik*, it was not accorded even to the intellectuals. The one was forced to remain in the State church because without compulsion the State church, now hardly more than a police department, might soon be devoid of a congregation, and the other were only permitted to choose between orthodoxy and atheism, and most of them chose atheism.

From this coercive system Witte turned away in angry disgust. With repression he had no sympathy. But his policy was inspired by considerations more respectable and more conducive to social well-being than mere personal likes or dislikes. He saw clearly the thinness of the bonds that held the various nationalities, and the various classes, and the populations of the various territories and climates together in a single community which had no common denominator, no point of convergence but a frail and irresolute monarch. Intuitively he gauged the force of the national bent towards territorial expansion, and by experience he knew that economic pressure would soon compel the rulers to choose between a series of reforms with which foreign conquests and even the perpetuation of the regime would be incompatible, and a system of coercion which would cause Russia to be outlawed by the nations of the world. And his way out of the difficulty, had he been authorised to take it, was to begin to introduce the most urgent reforms without delay, to place them once for all beyond the reach of the reactionary; to substitute law for caprice; to safeguard the liberty and cultivate the dignity of the individual; and parallel

with these measures to strengthen by legislation the levelling influence of the economic forces which his financial and industrial policy was rendering operative. Towards the non-Russian races, whose national spirit had been intensified and made aggressive by persecution, and who were now less likely than ever to coalesce voluntarily with the ruling people, he advocated a policy of generosity, a standing appeal to their nobler instincts and solidarity of interests. Thus he would have conciliated the Finns and quickened their advance along the road of civilisation. To the Poles he would have conceded a large measure of real autonomy. From the Jews he would have struck off their degrading fetters. The Armenians and all the other Caucasian peoples he would have left in peace. Lastly he would have striven to still the nation's greed for territorial aggrandisement by introducing intensive culture among the peasantry and thus removing one of its causes—dearth of land—by fostering Russian industries, and by opening vast new markets in the East for Russia's produce through railways and "peaceful penetration." That was the key to his grandiose schemes of railway building and also to his less commendable dealings with China. On those lines Witte's policy was laid. How he applied it to the grouping of powers, European and Asiatic, is another question with which I am not now concerned.

I do not for a moment suggest that Witte ever seriously approached this comprehensive problem of Russia's past in relation to her future as a whole. This would have been wasted effort in the reigns either of Alexander III. or Nicholas II., and he was not a man to throw away his time in unproductive speculation. But I know that some of its aspects were always before him and none of them was wholly missed. He had, however, greater and more numerous obstacles to surmount than any of his predecessors, not only because he was swimming against the main Russian stream, but also because his promotion to the highest position in the Empire drew upon him the opposition, the hatred, the calumnies, and the insidious machinations of a host of enemies to whom the last of the Tsars readily gave ear.

Under Alexander III. the great statesman was not permitted to venture even upon a temporary excursion into the domain of political reforms, and any headway he may have made in that direction was indirect. And to my knowledge Nicholas II. assured the chiefs of two States from whose lips I received the statement that he never from the first had the slightest confidence in Witte, never willingly gave him a free hand, nor trusted him as a public servant or a private individual.

I often told Witte that his hopes and aspirations were doomed to disappointment, and his natural sagacity made him aware of the fact. But he never wholly abandoned hope. He used to say that if Alexander III. had lived, or if his son Michael had succeeded him or were yet to come to the throne, much might be changed for the better and Russia's international position strengthened. My objection was that it was much too late. The Tsardom's sands were running down. And he sometimes agreed with me during those fits of dejection which often came over him of late years, especially after an animated talk with the Emperor or the discovery of a fresh intrigue against himself.

The thin flickering flame of democracy was fed with solid fuel when the army ceased to be professional. To my knowledge the significance and weight of this innovation as a factor in the destinies of Russia was not discerned at the time or since. Witte never once alluded to it. And yet, to my thinking, it imparted a tremendous impulse to the forces that first weakened and then broke up the Tsarist State. The professional army was a terrible weapon, an enlarged and perfected *opritchina* whose units were just human enough to take and execute orders, but were machines in every other respect. A soldier served for a quarter of a century. When he donned the uniform he quitted not only his family but the civil community for good. He became a unit in an organism, a function. He was severed from the nation as were Ivan's *opritchniki*, tempered, trained, attuned to a life apart. Military discipline was as severe as it must have been in the days of Rameses of Egypt or Nabonassar of Babylon. Punishments were ferocious, fiendish. Soldiers

thus kneaded and moulded could do great things and did them. For they were soldiers and nothing more. They loved only to fight, and had ceased to be peasants once they joined the ranks. There were no reserve officers then. An officer had as little to do with the people as had the soldier. Neither officer nor private felt any solidarity with the people. But with the change of the system of recruitment, the whole character of the army changed and also its capacity for military achievement. Compare closely the wars of Peter, Catherine, Paul, Alexander I., and Nicholas I. with the Turkish war of 1877 and the Manchurian campaign of 1904-5 and the difference will stand forth in relief. That, however, was the only one and the least momentous consequence of the change.

The democratic method of universal and short service having been established the traits of the peasantry were transplanted to the army and navy: the querulous, critical, satirical vein, the lack of finality in obedience and in everything, the anarchic tendency in a word. And as time went on the efficiency of the Russian soldier diminished perceptibly. Their generals, too, seem to have remained below the former high standard. But what is more to the point, the old army of Nicholas I. would have interposed an impassable barrier to a popular revolution. Under Nicholas II. the March explosion would have been stifled if the army had been opposed to it. But the peasant army which was sent against the German invaders was not steeled like the warriors who had made Russia's name famous in the eighteenth and in the early days of the nineteenth centuries. They hated war, were impatient to return to their fields, and took the first opportunity—when capital punishment was abolished—to fling their rifles in the bushes and go back to their families. And when appealed to by their hungry brethren to turn their rifles against the authorities and to merit the long promised land, they hearkened to the call and exploded the legend of the Little Father.

Those were some of the remoter and deeper causes of the Russian revolution. Their force was enhanced by the im-

politic action of the Tsar's ministers in allowing the relations between the central authorities and the masses—now growing more conscious and exacting—to be broken by myriads of irresponsible and unscrupulous petty officials instead of charging the zemstvos and the municipalities with the work of carrying them on. For the scandalous improbity of these unjust stewards embittered the peasants and the workmen, fanned the embers of discontent, and materially aided the professional revolutionists of the intelligentsia. It was this enormous disadvantage of the autocracy and the instinct of self-preservation which it quickened that moved its champions to overstep all bounds and found an order of men for whose iniquity western languages have no adequate name—men who enlisted conspirators, hatched damnable plots, coaxed and paid young lads to execute them, and as opportunity served either seized these tools and sent them to death or looked on while they committed the wanton abominations assigned to them. Reading or hearing about the foul deeds of miscreants like Azeff, Gapon, and Rasputin, and of the torture and horrible deaths of their victims, I am reminded of the lines which the poet Swinburne wrote at my request on an article of mine about Russian prisons:

"Earth is hell, and hell bows down before the Tsar,  
All its monstrous, murderous, lecherous births acclaim  
Him whose Empire lives to match its fiery fame.  
Nay, perchance at sight or sense of deeds here done,  
Here where men may lift up eyes to greet the sun,  
Hell recoils heart-stricken; horror worse than Hell  
Darkens earth and sickens heaven; life knows the spell,  
Shudders, quails, and sinks—or, filled with fiercer breath,  
Rises red in arms devised of darkling death.  
Pity mad with passion, anguish mad with shame,  
Call aloud on justice by her darker name . . ."

*Fortnightly Review*, August, 1890, p. 166.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE TSARDOM

AMONG all the odd freaks in the political domain, comparable, say, to the leaning tower of Pisa in the architectural sphere, the most amazing was the mighty Tsardom. For it was a synthesis of contradictories. A number of ethnic fragments without inner cohesiveness, with mutually conflicting tendencies, were loosely fastened together and wrought into a vast political organism. Out of a race prone to anarchy and devoid of political sense, an omnipotent bureaucracy was formed which claimed to regulate not only the business of the State, but the acts, the words, and the thoughts of the individual. Assuredly it was no small feat to knead a peasantry that loathes war and abhors discipline into one of the finest armies in Europe. Yet it was achieved by the Russian Tsars who preceded Alexander II. Viewed from without, the strong amalgam as contrasted with the smallness of its parts, suggested the pudding stone that consists of rounded pebbles embedded in flinty matrix. Contemplated from within, it might be likened to a political cord of sand, twisted by some mysterious spell. This rope of three strands, orthodoxy, autocracy, bureaucracy, or, as the Government put it, God, the Tsar, and the fatherland, with their army and bureaucracy, held together the mutually hostile elements of the Empire. And the strongest of the three was the bureaucracy which with its sixteen grades was created by Peter the Great after the Prussian model. Before it became a mere parasite, the bureaucracy democratised the nobility, ennobled individual peasants, and prepared the population for the action of the Church, thus enabling the Empire to attain high place in the hierarchy of nations. So powerful had this political entity grown by the middle of the eighteenth century that Catherine II. said, "If I could but reign two hundred years, all Europe would have to bend its neck

under the sceptre of Russia." Yet the bulk of Russians were confirmed pacifists and inarticulate anarchists. After the death of Nicholas I. the autocracy was never more than a name for a regime which, itself free from checks and independent of control, pressed heavily on the population and saddled one man with moral responsibility for decisions which he always lacked the data and often the will to take, while reducing him to the status of a figure-head.

The negative side of the Russian bureaucracy should not prevent us from seeing that it had a positive side as well, which was especially apparent when Peter first instituted it, or that the services it rendered to the country—in a clumsy, dilatory way—were real, and to a certain extent, educative. The wrench by which the imperial reformer dragged Russia from the deep rut into which she had fallen on to the high-way of cultural progress unleashed powerful forces which might have shattered the State fabric but for the moderating action of the bureaucracy. It was the *Tshin*,<sup>1</sup> too, that brought out the constructive quality of Peter's measures and gave form to the rude ideas of justice and morality which assuredly underlay his fundamental innovation. The Russian bureaucracy, foredestined to become in time a huge vampire, was at first an imitation of the bureaucracy of Prussia which raised that country to the highest place among the military nations of the world by dint of its conscientious service and marvellous organising powers. The difference between these two institutions lay less in the designs of their founders, or in the form of their organisations, than in the nature of their respective materials and of the framework in which they were set. It is the difference between the conscientious, plodding, resourceful Prussian, and the easy-going a-moral, anarchic Russian. This difference, ever in evidence, has been brought into sharp relief since the bureaucracy vanished and the masses have had their innings. And one can well understand the fierce desire of those who lived through the months of terror of 1917, the details of which are too horrid to be even hinted at, to bring back

<sup>1</sup> A Russian name for the bureaucracy or for one of its grades.

the old system or a derivative in order to recover the limited tranquillity which they once enjoyed without appreciating.

As for the Church, it was a mere museum of liturgical antiquities. Vladimir Solovieff used to liken it to a casket for an orient pearl whose lustre was dimmed by a thick crust of Byzantine dust. Its function in the State was never much more than that of a police department for the control of the kind of thought that is least open to regulation from without—that which speculates on problems of religion. The clergy, with the exception of a few self-mortifying anchorites and ascetics, were a body of social parasites, poor, squalid, grasping, and ignorant, their lives challenging and receiving alternate pity and contempt from the benighted flock whose shepherds they set up to be.

From the very outset the Russian Church was the repository of petrified forms to which a magic virtue was ascribed. No life-giving spirit ever animated that rigid body, for Byzance was powerless to give what it did not possess. How completely the spiritual energies of which a church is supposed to be the source were superseded by mechanical devices may be gathered from the well-attested fact—one of many—that the second Tsar of the House of Romanoff, Alexis Mikhailovitch, being a “truly religious monarch,” was wont to bow down reverently before the holy images, his forehead striking the cold stone floor one thousand five hundred times every morning. Saintly prince!

The religion of the Russian people—indulgence towards the erring and fellow-feeling for the suffering—has always been so much more than the resultant of Christianity that I feel disposed to regard it as wholly independent of that doctrine. Many years ago I had warm discussions on this subject with Count L. Tolstoy, who then held that the common Russian at his best was a living illustration of the transformation miracle which Christianity, rightly understood, could work in the rawest ethnic material. Unable to endorse this thesis, I got together such cultural vestiges of Russia's pre-Christian era as were available, and also

certain other data, which in my judgment go to show that the Russians' religion—like that of other peoples—is very largely the outcome of that nethermost permanent soul-current which is the appanage of race. And I may add that, after a series of animated talks, Tolstoy admitted that my theory was quite tenable and offers, perhaps, the best explanation of all the facts.

How completely the soul and mind of the people were confined in the darkness and bereft of spiritual nutrition, especially since Boris Godunoff bound the peasant to the glebe, may be illustrated by a few concrete examples. There is an anecdote told of how Peter the Great, when in Copenhagen, ordered one of his subjects to throw himself from the top of a high tower there just to show his spirit of submission. But it is apocryphal. Another story, historically vouched for, depicts the great Tsar, whose curiosity knew no bounds, as requesting the Elector Frederick III. to give him an opportunity of seeing how a man behaved when broken on the wheel, and by way of simplifying matters he offered one of the members of his own suite for execution. The following is also an attested narrative of a scene enacted during a review of the recruits in Vilna, shortly before Nicholas II. came to the throne. I was in Russia at the time. "What is military discipline?" the commanding general asked one of the new soldiers. "It means, your Excellency, that a soldier has got to do exactly what his superior officer tells him, only nothing against the Tsar." "Right, and now let us work it out. Take your cap, bid farewell to your comrades, and go and drown yourself in the lake there. Look sharp!" Tears glistened in the poor fellow's eyes, he gazed prayerfully at his commander, turned suddenly right about, made a dash for the lake, and was on the very brink when recalled by the sergeant sent to prevent the involuntary suicide.

This blind obedience of the peasant was at the root of the military efficiency of the Russian soldier before universal service was made obligatory. For dash in battle, endurance of hardships and suffering, and contempt of death that old

army occupied a foremost place among the forces of the world. This transmutation of individual pacifism and fatalism into warlike virtues is one of the ironies of circumstance. After generations of frightful discipline, the average Russian was no longer conscious that he had any claim to justice or pity. Taking everything for granted he accounted for his own misery by ascribing it to Fate's iron decrees against which it would be vain as well as wicked to murmur. "Why," writes the famous Saltykoff, "why does our peasant go in bast shoes instead of leather boots? Why does such dense and widespread ignorance prevail throughout the land? Why does the mooshik seldom or never eat meat, butter, or even animal fat? How does it come to pass that you rarely meet a peasant who knows what a bed is? Why is it that we discern in all the movements of the Russian mooshik a fatalistic vein, devoid of the impress of conscience? Why, in a word, do the peasants come into the world like insects and die like summer flies?"<sup>1</sup> And again: "The common Russian man not only suffers, but consciousness of his pain is singularly blunted, deadened. He looks upon his misery as a species of original sin to be borne instead of grappled with, as long as his staying powers hold out."<sup>2</sup> He was to be pitied in his misery, and is to be redoubted in his emancipation. Like fire or water, he is a good servant but a bad master.

The story of the emancipation of the serfs, from conception to realisation, brings to light a number of curious illustrations of the temper of the peasants, of their crass ignorance and of their absurd opposition to the measures taken to relieve their distress. Nicholas I. harboured the intention of raising the status of the peasant, tied at that time to the glebe, from bondage to relative liberty, and to make a beginning with the serfs of the imperial domains. But the first obstacle he encountered was raised by the serfs themselves. Some eight thousand of the soil-tillers whom he was about to set free decided to offer passive

<sup>1</sup> *Signs of the Times*, by M. Saltykoff.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters about the Provinces*, by M. Saltykoff, p. 260.

opposition to the arrangements. And they withstood their imperial emancipator with stoicism. The officer of the gendarmes, Stogoff, appeared on the scene with twelve gendarmes shouldering loaded guns to bring them to reason in approved Russian fashion.

Stogoff first addressed the peasants, about half of whom were Tartars, and asked them whether they would reconsider their decision and knuckle down. "No," was the curt answer given in unison.<sup>1</sup> "Well, children, you know that I shall have to shoot, congruously with the terms of the law.' 'Shoot then, little father, the bullet will find the guilty ones, as God will.' 'Now, brethren, listen.' Here I doffed my hat, turned devoutly towards the church, made the sign of the cross, and exclaimed: 'Like you, brethren, I am orthodox. It is never too late to fire. We are all in the hands of God. If an innocent man be shot, I shall be called to a strict account by God. In order, therefore, to make no mistake, I am going to put the question to each of you in turn. And he who will not bow to the law will only have himself to blame.'

"I then turned to the first, 'Will you obey the law?' 'No, I won't.' 'But the Tsar is the anointed of the Lord. You are disobeying God.' 'I won't obey.' Thereupon I delivered the peasant to a gendarme with the words, 'Well, don't blame me now.' The gendarme handed him over to another, and so he was passed on till he got to a covered courtyard where they filled his mouth with tow, bound his hands with straps and his feet with cords, and stretched him on the floor. I had the patience to put the same question to every peasant, and from every one I received the same answer, and each one was duly tied and laid on the floor. This procedure lasted until the evening church service. The last ten, half of them Mordvins, half Russians, submitted and were allowed to go home. That night I neither slept, nor ate, nor drank, for in a business of that nature everything depends on the speed with which you act.

"When I entered the courtyard, it was filled with the

<sup>1</sup> What follows is related in the words of Stogoff himself.

mutineers bound hand and foot. 'Rods,' I cried. 'Bring up the first.' And they produced an old man of seventy. 'Will you obey?' 'No, I won't.' 'Flog him then. . . .' The old man raised his head and besought me saying, 'Order him to deal the strokes quicker.' But it was out of my power to help him, because one really could not forgive the first man, as everything would then be lost. At last, however, the old fellow was dead and I ordered them to put the hand-cuffs on the corpse. In this way, after, the other thirteen were beaten until they were dead. The fourteenth moved forward and exclaimed, 'I submit!' 'Ah, you scoundrel, why didn't you submit before? If you had, then the others would have obeyed who have been beaten to death. Here, give him three hundred strokes.' That clinched the matter. All those who lay on the ground cried out, 'We all submit. Forgive us!' 'To forgive you is out of my power for you are guilty in the eyes of God and the Tsar.' 'Well, then, punish us, but be merciful.'

"One should understand the Russian man," adds Stogoff. "He is frank, submissive, and calm when punished for a fault, but without the punishment his promises are worthless, he waxes restless, waits for what may yet turn up, and commits fresh follies. But he who has been chastised is afraid to offend again and he calms down. I ordered the soldiers to break up into groups and to inflict a hundred strokes on each of the mutineers, under the eyes of the superintendent, then I called them all together and said, 'I have done what the law obliged me to do. Only the governor can forgive. He can also shut you all up in prison and leave you there till you rot.'<sup>1</sup> 'Little father,' they cried, 'you are our real father. Intercede for us. Turn wrath into mercy as God does.' I made them fall on their knees, taught them how to beg for mercy, and promised to take their part, but added that the governor was very angry." As a matter of fact the governor was in bed, ill from fear. Stogoff concerted a little farce with him and afterwards, in the presence of the peasants, undertook to vouch for their

<sup>1</sup> The time was the year 1838, the place the province of Simbirsk,

future good conduct. He then took his leave and started for Petersburg, taking with him the blessings and thanks of the peasants! <sup>1</sup>

For ages the grip of the ruling caste, even on the souls of the people, was everywhere firm except where religious fanaticism loosened it. For there were always some millions made of the stuff of martyrs who clung to their faith through ruthless persecution and cruel torture, even when that faith differed from the State creed only in the most trivial details, such as making the sign of the cross with two fingers instead of three, or repeating Allelujah in the liturgy twice in lieu of thrice. And yet, to my recollection, a community of Old Believers in Kursk once resolved to display their joy at the escape of Alexander III. from an attempt on his life which had killed many of his suite <sup>2</sup> by abandoning their own religious creed and embracing that which had the honour to reckon his Majesty among its members. The number of souls who thus risked their salvation for the Tsar was 1146, and they received the thanks of the sovereign for their loyalty. It is no exaggeration to say that at times the bulk of the orthodox nation were of no stronger fibre than those Old Believers who merited the name of "Jellymen."

The material on which the rulers had to work was uncommonly tough and intractable, but for a long time their endeavours were not altogether fruitless. Even later, if the government had taken its rôle seriously and endeavoured to engraft on the people habits of sobriety, thrift, self-help, and to promote their welfare within certain broad limits, one might wink at some of the practices which had for their object the interests of the autocracy at the expense of the nation. But the system was immoral, infamous. I witnessed its operations at close quarters, having been consecutively a student, a university graduate, a doctor, a professor, a member of the staff of two journals and the editor of a third. When I occupied the chair of Comparative Philology in the Ukrainian University of Kharkoff, the central government,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Russian Heads*, by Dr. T. Schiemann.

<sup>2</sup> At Borki.



then represented by Count Delyanoff,<sup>1</sup> an Armenian, created the office of moral censors known as "beadles," whose function was to watch over the morality of the students and see that the influence of the professors over them was not politically baleful. In truth they were spies and fomentors of discord. As they were hated alike by the students and by the faculties, I at first disbelieved the sinister stories about them which sounded like wild fabrications. But a colleague of mine, a scholar of insinuating ways, concerted with me to send for the two Catos who had charge of the morality of our University of Kharkoff to win their confidence and have a friendly chat with them on the subject of their past. Having first dealt generously by the needy officials, we cross-questioned them in a friendly way, whereupon they unburdened their souls freely, in Russian fashion. Turning to one of them my colleague asked, "What profession did you follow last year, before you were appointed beadle?" Unabashed, he made answer, "I was fairly well off until my illness. I had a lucrative situation as a waiter in the T. dancing tavern where free-and-easy women of the town drop in of a night to earn a little cash from the loose fellows who have too much of it. And I used to come in for a fair share of money and money's worth myself, you know. But I got into trouble and . . ." "And you?" inquired my friend, nodding to the other beadle. "I was a—chucker-out in a brothel in X Street, you know the one I mean, it is near Y X Square on the left, you remember? I also had an interest in the concern myself, but unluckily it went smash owing to a misunderstanding with the police and then I lost my daily bread. But God was merciful and He sent me this post, blessed be His name." I repeated this story later to his Excellency, the Curator of the University, with a view to have these two moral mentors appointed to situations better adapted to their special qualifications than

<sup>1</sup> Minister of Public Institution. An amiable man in social life, but a semi-educated snob, who looked upon education as a means of enlisting the intelligent classes on the side opposed to the people, and even this view he borrowed from Count Dmitry Tolstoy.

that of educators of the young. But he laughed till he nearly fell off the ottoman. "Just the right kind of fellow to drill the blackguard students and teach them the way they should go," he said, and the tears rolled down his venerable cheeks. In truth the mechanism of government had run down and there was no one to wind it up. That was the clue to the situation. One does not need to be told how corrosive the influence of agents of this kind must have been on the youth of the country. Here one finds the line of cleavage between the Russian and the Prussian State.

In those and later days when occupation of some kind had to be found for the educated youth of the country, the authorities, from the ministers in the capital down to the beadles in the provincial universities, encouraged the rising generation to expend their superfluous or even vital energy in drinking, profligacy, and kindred vice, that being the easiest way to stifle the revolutionary impulse. Every species of delinquency found forgiveness or connivance barring disaffection to the autocracy. The political dissident critic and grumbler were unprincipled mischief-makers for whom no punishment was too severe. When after the Crimean war the Russian press received relative freedom of political opinion it was restricted to foreign politics. Publicists were permitted to describe, analyse, and appreciate the forms and defects of the government of Naples, Spain, Britain, or France, but the Tsardom was a sacred domain into which it would have been sacrilege to penetrate. This perpetual restriction was one of the sources of the mischievous influence which internal questions came at last to have on Russia's international relations, which in turn contributed to shape the government's home policy. The formula of the latter nexus would seem to have been this: every shock and concussion from without, such as an unsuccessful war, had as its inevitable correlate a loosening of the grip of the bureaucracy on the nation. And in effect political concessions of various kinds and degrees followed almost at once upon each unsuccessful military expedition, and every pretext was utilised that subsequently offered to withdraw or whittle down the

reforms thus conceded. In this systole and diastole of autocracy Russia's history since the beginning of the nineteenth century is epitomised.

By the time when the struggle between the old spirit and the new was growing deadly, the bureaucracy already regarded the backwardness of the people as an indispensable condition of its own existence. In home affairs, the nation was an adjective which had no other use than that of qualifying the substantive which was the State. Hence, economically, the Russian people was treated as a wealth-creating mechanism whose worth was measurable by the value of its labour after taking off the cost of production. From the peasantry on whose shoulders rested the weight of Empire the authorities extracted everything they could, giving back little or nothing in return, and the peasant dealt in a like manner with the soil he tilled; putting nothing into it, he took out all it could be made to yield. Abhorring intensive culture, he thus plundered the land, exhausted its fertility, and then clamoured for more. That was one source of the outcry for more land, the truth being that, during the second half of the reign of Nicholas II., the average amount of land possessed by the peasant ought to have sufficed, had it been tilled as in Prussia or Belgium. The government for the service of its public debt was accustomed to export large quantities of corn to its foreign creditors, thus leaving the native producer face to face with a food deficit that rendered famines periodical as the snows, or rather perennial like the Siberian plague. Hunger-stricken peasants thus furnishing foreign peoples with abundant and cheap food-stuffs was another bit of that irony that so often, in Russia, aggravated suffering and intensified resentment. How could the simple-minded peasants, accustomed to see such iniquities perpetrated in the names of God and the Tsar, be expected to obey divine or human law? Direct taxes were gathered with the lash, and indirect contributions to the Treasury extracted through the tavern. For the duty of drinking vodka was sedulously inculcated upon the tillers of the soil, and temptation was set before them by guile and by force at the

behest or with the connivance of the authorities who professed to be bringing them up by hand. "It is a matter of surprise," exclaimed a well-known writer, "that a people should continue even to exist which is thus ground down on all sides and ruined."<sup>1</sup> And yet minister after minister managed to solve the puzzling problem of extracting out of these lack-alls the money which they did not possess. "These men," wrote another publicist,<sup>2</sup> "can scarcely be called human beings. They are more like machines for the payment of taxes, half-conscious creatures who fancy themselves created for the purpose of working on in hopeless toil." Utterances like these remind one of Arthur Young's remarks about France on the eve of the great Revolution, and the facts they comment upon partly explain how insensible Russian peasants proved, on the outbreak of the revolution, to the œstrum of moral responsibility.

For a long while it seemed to the Russians themselves that there was no hope of betterment. I remember talking the matter over with the zealous Archbishop of Kherson and Odessa, Nikanor, many years ago. He shook his head mournfully and reminded me of what he had said publicly on a very solemn occasion a few weeks before: "Altogether the state of things in Russia is superlatively sad. The people's minds are terribly dark and there is no sign of the coming dawn." Mental darkness and moral obliquity were the postulates of the Tsarist State. Remove them and the fabric was bound to fall. In an article which I wrote in the reign of Alexander III. on the obscurantist policy of Pobiedonostseff, I put forward the view which subsequent events have borne out, that that statesman took the most efficacious means to achieve his end.

In spite of the listlessness and resignation of the peasantry, their land hunger gradually placed them in opposition to the State whose greed of agricultural produce made its rule arbitrary and ruthless. But the authorities shifted the odium from themselves to the land owners. The masses hung their

<sup>1</sup> *The Messenger of Europe*, pp. 781-782, October, 1890.

<sup>2</sup> In *The Messenger of Europe*, 1890.

faith and their resignation on the fiction which they firmly believed that the Tsar was desirous of bestowing all the land on them, but was temporarily thwarted, partly by maleficent officials and very largely by the landed proprietors. Against these an angry feeling was engendered among the Tsar-fearing people, which, on occasion, spurted up in the form of riots and necessitated occasional sops in the shape of shadowy reform measures.

But in the long run the demoralising influence of a system of governance which took no thought of the people's interest was sure to produce its own antidote. It first provoked a number of partial explosions which the bureaucracy refused to construe as warnings, and then produced the volcanic outburst of fire and flame and liquid lava which has reduced the state organism to a heap of ghastly ruins. Out of these it is now hoped that the nation will arise one day radiant and with strength of wing for a long and lofty flight.

The catastrophe would have occurred last century had it not been for the circumstance that the Russian people remained moveless and cataleptic in their mediæval groove in consequence of their isolation from western Europe. Although they received from abroad most of what they prized and had nothing cultural to offer in return, they were long beyond the reach of the fertilising currents that flowed through the continent from the French side of the Pyrenees to the mountains of Transylvania and even to the basin of the Vistula and the plains of Poland. The Byzantine Church, with no international centre, cut off from communion with other Christian denominations and devoid of its own springs of learning and culture, bulked large as a barrier between East and West and kneaded its adepts until they became amenable to the stupefying sedative of numbing doctrines. Everything that tended to break down that barrier, to burst the dam and let the stream of western culture into the Tsardom, was welcomed by the intelligentsia and repressed by the authorities as a force on the side of the people against the prevailing system of masked servitude. One of the oldest and most elusive of these was religious sectarianism.

In time these forces waxed numerous and formidable. The introduction of foreign capital into the Empire by Count Witte and together with it of western conceptions of living and working incompatible with the traditional ordering of the community; the spread of industries; the formation of a floating class of workers who spent the winter in factories and the remainder of the year on the land, a new body of skilled artisans wholly cut off from the land, freed from the fetters that hampered the peasant and initiated into the system of organised self-help by co-operation and self-defence by strikes—generated new material conditions to which the others tended to conform. The progress of education, technical and general, and the influence of literature and journalism which flashed powerful searchlights on revolting episodes of the people's life, radiated new ideas about the relations between rulers and subjects, employers and labourers, and filled men with resentment against the class that had theretofore governed the Empire. Further, the religious spirit, quickened with a solvent critical quality, gave rise to new sects of a rationalistic and therefore iconoclastic character that sapped the awe which the man of the people had long entertained of his masters, and loosened the conception of authority generally to a degree unimagined in the West. Military service, too, which abounded in splendid opportunities for revolutionary propaganda, furnished a suitable body for the new spirit of rebellion that was gradually taking possession of the generation contemporary with Nicholas II.

## CHAPTER V

### SOME PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

WHEN I first went to Russia the Liberal movement that had been making headway ever since the death of Nicholas I. was in full swing, and in spite of such set-backs as the reaction caused by the abortive attempt on the life of Alexander II. was perceptibly nearing a climax. I came in contact with many of the eminent men of that epoch, and also with the type of Nihilist described by Turghenieff.<sup>1</sup> In the course of those years I also had ample opportunities to study the Russian character in various types and in various social layers, and despite its defects, some of which are repellent, I felt drawn towards it irresistibly. The charm it sometimes possesses is hardly definable and yet at its best is positively captivating. Some Russians—Vladimir Solovieff was an instance—carry with them a mystical and subtle atmosphere of the marvellous, which throws work-a-day concerns wholly out of the perspective, seems to melt solid obstacles, to shrivel up space, do away with time, and imbue one with the airy spirit of a thaumaturge. And yet the very essence of the spell is unaffected simplicity.

One of the first phenomena that pressed its unfamiliarity upon my attention was the privileged status of educated women and the sterling qualities by which some of them justified and maintained it. Their minds were worthy of

<sup>1</sup> By way of preparation I had studied Slav languages at the University of Innsbruck, and afterwards under Leskien at the University of Leipzig, and the first period of my sojourn in Russia was spent on the Steppes of the Ukraine where I acquired the language of the province. Since then I lived and worked for years in close contact with the Liberal movement under three Tsars, and in various capacities as a student, as a graduate of two Russian Faculties and Universities, as Professor of Comparative Philology at the University of Kharkoff, as the author of several literary and scientific works, as leader-writer of two Russian newspapers and editor of one, as representative of the *Daily Telegraph*, and adviser to my eminent friend Count Witte.

their hearts, the true sources of that natural religion of sympathy and pity which seldom fails to captivate the foreigner. Another peculiarity that arrested my attention was the political division of the population into classes and castes, among which by far the worst off were the peasants and the Jews. In the province of Kieff I was favourably situated to study at close quarters the disabilities of both.

One of the phenomena that struck me most forcibly as characteristic of the political regime was the sharp division between the classes and the masses or, as the two were then termed, between society—meaning the thinking and writing sections—and the people. My first impression was that of a conquered race and its foreign masters, the latter living upon the substance of the former and giving little or nothing in return. This impression was deepened by what I learned of the rôle of the bureaucracy which soon appeared as what it really was—parasitic. A petty official was in some respects a tsarlet. He could achieve certain difficult feats that were beyond the power of the Emperor, and was often able to shield the guilty, condemn the innocent, perpetuate crying abuses, and ignore the commands of the Tsar. All these impressions were the results of experiences at various times and places.

One of my first experiences illustrated the hapless lot of the peasantry in one of the southern provinces where they were much better off than in the north. The incident happened near the village of Nabutoff, in the province of Kieff, many miles from a town. One Sunday afternoon I was wandering alone in the steppe, resting between whiles and dipping into a book, when I became aware all at once that a group of half-sober peasants were at my heels. They yelled out menacingly, called me a Turkish spy, and ordered me to halt. Instead of complying, however, I moved rapidly towards the river that separated me from the distant manor in which I resided, but finding no boat to carry me across I surrendered to the peasants whose numbers had grown considerably and whose hostility was no longer masked. They charged me with being a Turkish spy, and some of



them wanted to drown or hang me without further parley. And I believe they would have done it on the spot but for the warning of one individual who affirmed that he had seen me before, knew I was English, and that none of them would escape severe punishment if they harmed me. They then emptied my pockets, abstracted all the money I had—some fifty roubles—and with great reluctance allowed me to send a messenger to the owner of the house where I was staying. After a couple of hours I was finally released, but the peasants had spent my money and were unable or unwilling to refund it. Two days later the village elder paid me a visit, offered his excuses, and informed me that three of the villagers had been soundly flogged by his orders and in his presence, and he wished to know whether I should like any more of them subjected to the same punishment. If so, he would fix the time to suit my convenience so that I could watch the execution if I desired. I expostulated with him, told him that I disapproved of flogging, and discoursed to him on human dignity, but he only remarked that a mooshik who has never been flogged is good for nothing.

In the following year I was at the University of St. Petersburg studying Oriental languages and I had the good fortune to meet prominent men of all classes and parties, including the novelists Dostoyeffsky, Gontshareff, and Leskoff.<sup>1</sup> One afternoon, in the interval between two sections of one of the fashionable open-air concerts that were daily given at Pavloffsk, near Tsarskoye Selo, at which several grand dukes and many court dignitaries and ministers were present, I was in a group the centre of which was the Minister of the Interior,<sup>2</sup> when an acquaintance of mine, Count A., came up, took the minister aside, and in my presence complained of the intractable disposition of his nephew, to whom I had given tuition. "The long and short of it is," he concluded,

<sup>1</sup> Others were Russia's only philosopher, Vladimir Solovieff, who afterwards became a close friend of mine; Katkoff, the greatest journalist Russia ever had, the editor of the principal Moscow daily paper; and Bilbassoff, editor of the Petersburg *Goloss*.

<sup>2</sup> Timasheff.

"that he is a scapegrace and bids fair to become a criminal, and I can do nothing with him. He borrows money from the servants, spends it in houses of ill repute, drinks, gambles, and is not amenable to reason, and I want you to help me."

"With pleasure," the minister replied. "Only tell me in what form you wish for help. I can shut your nephew up if that would meet your wishes, but I suppose you would draw the line at incarceration. If so, I can bundle him off to Siberia, or Archangel, or the Caucasus, or Central Asia."

"Central Asia! That's it. Send him there. But how will he live?"

"Oh, I'll put him into the army in Tashkent and his superior officer will do the rest. He will certainly strike the fear of God into his soul and see that his body is fed and clad, I answer for that. The day after to-morrow then at nine in the morning a gendarme will fetch him, and you need worry no more."

The uncle uttered his thanks and the conversation took another turn. Two days later the prodigal youth was duly transferred to Tashkent and I never had tidings of him again. I referred to the subject later on, when I had come to know the minister better, and I asked him whether the law really invested him with the power he had invoked. He replied in the affirmative, quoted a clause of the statute, and remarked that what with the code of laws and the vast discretionary powers conferred on ministers to deal with persons administratively, the liberty of the subject was no better guaranteed in Russia than in France of Louis XIV. when *lettres de cachet* opened the Bastille to so many members of the aristocracy. He added that neither he nor, so far as he knew, his colleagues would employ that power without first satisfying their consciences that they were not the instruments of personal hatred or injustice.

I have little doubt that M. Timasheff was a conscientious official in the Russian sense of the word, as was also the Minister of Justice, Count Pahlen, who had recently resigned. But none the less the system which they represented was weighing heavily on the nation. Cases of crying

injustice perpetrated by provincial organs of the central government occasionally came to my knowledge. At the university espionage and its by-products were occasional phenomena. It is fair to say, however, that I always found those ministers to whom I had access ready to listen to any appeal on behalf of victims if grounded on fact. Once when the "Liberals," as the revolutionary students were then euphemistically termed, were hard pressed by the police most members of the group with which I often mixed were arrested one after the other. My card having been found on one of the accused, he was plied with questions as to my opinions and actions, and I was cautioned by my friends to make ready to be arrested. But it was the unexpected that happened. One morning professors and students were thunderstruck to learn that one of the most promising students of the university had disappeared, nobody knew how. Alexeyenko—that was his name—had never been suspected by any of us. Apparently, and so far as we knew, his was the scholar's temper of mind rather than the revolutionary's unmeasured zeal for the welfare of his fellows. He had been regular in his attendance at the mathematical faculty and successful in his special studies there. He was in his fourth and last year and his professors were proud of him. Yet he was spirited away so mysteriously that some days elapsed before we learned that he had been kidnapped by the police in the street when returning home after midnight. As it was known that I was personally acquainted with the Minister of the Interior I was asked by a colleague and friend, who has since become one of the pillars of the autocracy, to appeal to him for the release of the prisoner, and I accepted the mission. On this occasion, however, I failed to see Timasheff himself, but I gave the message to his brother-in-law, who shortly afterwards brought me this answer: "The minister has no knowledge of the arrest. Give him details, and if Alexeyenko be as innocent as you maintain he shall be restored to his home and his studies." The students to whom I communicated these tidings were delighted. A few days later came another message from

Timasheff exhorting me to pursue the matter and let him know the result. The idea that an all-powerful minister should apply to a mere student for information about official acts amused me. But the prisoner could not be traced. At last a smuggled missive reached one of his university friends to the effect that he had been conveyed from gaol to gaol and was in the prison of X in western Siberia at the time of writing. I communicated this information to the minister who certainly fulfilled his promise and opened an inquiry into the facts, but with what result I never learned. Nor did I ever hear of Alexeyenko any more.

Although at first things in the Tsardom attracted my attention less in proportion to their specific weight than to the freshness of the impressions they produced, I felt at every hand's turn the consequence of Russia's long inaccessibility to western influences, and was struck with the complete cultural separation of class from class in the Empire. As for the lower orders their entire mental structure seemed different from that of the "intellectuals." At that time the merchants formed almost a close corporation of their own with hallowed traditions, recognised customs, class jealousy, and even a remarkable literary exponent in the person of the playwright Ostroffsky, who has left a complete and realistic picture of their every-day life then on the eve of its transformation. The secular clergy, too, were still a caste, their very language being tinged with mediævalism, and their principal sources of training were ecclesiastical schools and seminaries where instruction was superficial and theological. But the most isolated and peculiar of all were the peasants. So long as they were serfs they had the landlord's advice, which was a benefit when he was enlightened and well disposed, but after their emancipation the villages were proclaimed independent and "self-governing" and closed to all outside influences. Thenceforth only a peasant might vote in the village assembly. Representatives of the upper and better informed classes, like the squire, the parish priest, the doctor, even though they had resided for years in the village, were not

entitled to take hand or part in arranging its affairs. Their moral influence was rigorously excluded, and the ignorant soil-tillers became the wards and the prey of their own more cunning and unscrupulous members, who embezzled and cheated and committed every kind of enormity unchecked. For the *Mir* in those days had the power to deport any of its members to Siberia without giving him the benefit of trial or alleging any legal charge against him, and a clever Machiavellian elder had but to supply his fellow-villagers with copious draughts of vodka to get them to pronounce any decree within their competence. This type of man was commonly termed a *Koolak*, or fist, to symbolise his utter callousness to pity and ruth. And of all the human monsters I have met in my travels I cannot recall any so malignant and odious as the Russian *Koolak*. In the revolutionary horrors of 1905 and 1917 he was the ruling spirit—a fiend incarnate.

At the university I found myself in contact with apostles of revolution who talked as though society were a mass of clay capable of being fashioned at will by the social potter. History they despised without knowing, and the theory of evolution they treated as a disembodied fancy of the pseudo-scientific brain. Crass ignorance, ingrained prejudice, and inability to face adverse facts were characteristics of the leaders of the movement at the university. I remember one in particular who frankly admitted that he never opened a book nor attended a lecture, but simply lived for and on the coming revolution. This typical youth, who had entered the university from an ecclesiastical seminary, had no fixed abode, nearly always carried with him forbidden leaflets, proclamations, and newspapers hidden inside his scanty clothing, yet he had the good fortune to be always arrested when he chanced to have none of these compromising evidences on his person. From time to time we met to discuss general principles—I was not a member of the inner circle—to formulate the ideals of the nation, and analyse the means proposed for attaining them. Letters were then read from ardent spirits who had devoted their lives to the people,

were living among them in isolation and hardship, and fancied that they could fathom the ideas and divine the real sentiments of the peasant. Several of these men, who were always accompanied and keyed up by resolute, selfless, and enthusiastic young women, were pale reflections of Turghenieff's Rudin, but more than one yielded to temptation, turned against their comrades, and delivered them up to the authorities. Many settled down in time and became respected bureaucrats. Naturally I admired the ardour and self-denial of the few, the champions of a popular cause, who stirred in men and women a sense of the vast potentialities of their nation and the human race, and for a time I accepted their definition of Russia's aims as correct.

But it gradually dawned on me, and also on my close friend, the future pillar of Panslavism and autocracy, that whatever one might think about the social and political theories of the revolutionaries, they were uniformly wrong in their facts and forecasts. Thus their anticipation of the peasants' attitude towards the government were invariably belied by events. Tshernyshevsky, for example, whose writing we secretly read and warmly discussed, had staked his reputation and also the fate of his scheme on the postulate that the peasants would not accept their emancipation as offered by Alexander II., but would rise in arms and overthrow the government. He next believed that their calm resignation was but temporary, and that within two years' time the long hoped for rebellion would convulse the Empire. All the expectations and most of the assumptions of Bakunin and Herzen had also vanished at the touch of reality, and the Russian peasantry remained the impenetrable Sphinx it had been before. Nobody then nor, indeed, for forty years longer could put into words the ideals of the people—and had they divined them, no apostle, no idealist, could have utilised them for the purpose of arousing enthusiasm and generating the motive power for a revolution. The groundwork of the peasants' own scheme for his well-being is formed by what diplomatists would term "healthy robust egotism," and his cherished method is expropriation. The picture which was

commonly drawn of the tiller of the soil by the "intellectuals" was the projection of a poetic brain, a synthesis of the qualities adequate for the founders of a latter-day Utopia. In a word, the so-called leaders of the nation had not the remotest conception of the nation's world-philosophy, instincts, or strivings.

Looking back at their words and acts I can affirm that they created an imaginary nation after their own heart, and worked by fits and snatches and with unsuitable weapons for the welfare of that. And from that day to this the chasm between the two has never been bridged.

The abortive revolution of 1905-6, the failure of the constitutional parties to hammer in the adamantine wedge which the defeat of the bureaucracy by the Japanese had inserted into the State framework, and finally the Kadets' <sup>1</sup> ignorance of the movement that culminated in the outburst of March, 1917, their helplessness in face of a set of circumstances which, rightly handled, would have kept the Empire for a time intact and placed its social and political ordering in their own hands, but, botched as it was, opened the sluice gates to the floods of anarchy—are all object lessons on the difficulty of interpreting aright the spiritual and material needs and longings of the Russian people. These requirements and strivings are, to my thinking, largely conditioned by the historical factors already enumerated, and in especial by the numbing influence of ages of cultural isolation. There is a thick substratum of primeval savagery in the peasant's composition not at all far from the surface which separates him widely, not only from western peoples, but also from the intellectuals of his own race as they appear in their public words and acts. The revolting behaviour of the soldiery and the peasantry to their own kith and kin during the nation's *delirium tremens* after March, 1917, which even revolutionary history is too prude to record, offers irrefragable evidence of the deplorable fact that the bulk of the Russian people is still in that primitive stage when

<sup>1</sup> The "Kadets" are the Constitutional Democrats presided over by M. Milyukoff. The name arose from the initial letters of the two words—K. D.

self-government, even in the diluted form in which it is vouchsafed to some continental nations, would harm in lieu of helping it. Education and careful training will in time qualify the people for an ever larger share in the conduct of its affairs, but in the meanwhile its spokesmen and trustees are tearing the political organism into shreds. Under a wise and strong government the peasants become as clay in the potter's hands—plasticity being one of the racial traits common to them with all their race. But take away the compelling force and they become human frenzies. The Northern Slav is an amalgam of contradictions: he can put forth stupendous efforts for a short while, but is incapable of sustaining a moderate endeavour perseveringly until the object is achieved.

Some of the types of the rising generation with whom I was thrown into contact at the university would have exercised the ingenuity of the most experienced psychologist and tempted a literary portraitist like Balzac. The procession of them that passed before my eyes kept my mind constantly in an active mood ever seeking for labels and sometimes finding none that were applicable. I remember in particular the following incident characteristic of much. I had asked a professor to read the book of Genesis with me in Hebrew and to give me the benefit of his special knowledge of that subject. He agreed to do this, provided that I found three other students willing to join me, and that he might deliver the lectures every Monday morning at nine in his own private dwelling. The hour was repellent to many, considering that we were then in the height of the winter season, but I contrived to persuade two students to join the class. To get a third, however, seemed impossible. At last I besought one of our comrades, a fine, tall, well-built youth who was studying Chinese and Mongol and, unlike so many others, was well-to-do, content with the world, and shy of politics. But when he learned the hour of the lecture and the place—which was very remote from the street in which his own rooms were situate—he refused categorically to join the class. And all my suasion was in



vain. Somehow I mentioned casually it would be only once a week, every Monday morning, and he at once exclaimed, "Oh, Monday morning? Yes, of course, I can come. Nothing easier. You see every Sunday I spend the night in a house of—of—amusement a stone's throw from the professor's place, and I get up about eight or half-past eight, so that I can be at his rooms by nine without an effort. I will oblige you." Accordingly he too came—straight from his dissipation—and we had our lecture on Genesis. One day he was late and the professor, in consequence of some jocular allusion of ours, the point of which he missed, put a plain question and wormed the secret out of us, and on learning the motives that had determined his fourth student to frequent his lectures on Genesis he laughed heartily.

The oriental faculty was the least political section of the university. Its students held aloof from revolutionary meetings, and either worked very hard or enjoyed life to the top of their bent. Our friend of the Monday morning lectures having burned the candle at both ends and also in the middle, melted away rapidly and was buried within a twelvemonth.

With the bureaucracy and its workings I became acquainted under the guidance of a few of its gifted members, one, the celebrated Tertius Philippoff, imperial comptroller, who took me into his department, gave me a post there, and initiated me into the psychology of the *tshinovnik*; another, Basil Grigorieff, Professor of Oriental Languages and Director-General of the Censor's Department; and a less exalted but more highly endowed censor, who had fought in the Crimea and was one of the most gifted, typical, devil-may-care, captivating Russians, and one of the most plausible Nihilists I ever met. S. K. had witnessed the utter breakdown of the bureaucratic war machine under Nicholas I. and had contemplated the misery it inflicted on the soldiers whose heroism, unrequited and unrewarded, was unparalleled. He had observed the progress of revolutionary propaganda in the army, among Russian soldiers, in Bulgaria and in Warsaw; and in his capacity of censor he was

continually reading revolutionary leaflets, manifestos, newspapers, and books, and discussing them with hardly veiled sympathies. He supplied me with the forbidden works of Dobroliuboff, Tshernyshevsky, Herzen, and others, and gradually filled me with pity for the victims of the autocratic Juggernaut and with loathing for the idol and its priests. In speculative matters there were no bounds to S. K.'s enterprise: he would call in question the holiest institutions, attack the root dogmas of Christianity, or the morality of remaining alive in this world of misery and squalor, but he discharged the duties of censor efficiently and with a breadth of view in which his colleagues were lacking, and always congruously with the letter of the law. He was at once a most successful apostle of Nihilism and one of the most efficient servants of the State.

In those days I used frequently to visit the palace of Tsarskoye Selo, accompanied by a member of a family which, at that time, was living on terms of close friendship with that of the heir apparent, afterwards Alexander III. The Tsarevitch and his consort called occasionally at the villa where the head of the family resides, and it was there that I first saw and spoke to him. When S. K. heard of my visits to the palace he exclaimed, "Look well at the children of the Tsarevitch Alexander Alexandrovitch. None of them will ever reach the throne. Mark my words. I think I know my country." I noted his prophecy which was not fulfilled, but it came very near to the mark. I watched the children of the Tsarevitch and speculated in my mind on their future. In particular I made inquiries respecting the character and mental outfit of him who I afterwards saw crowned as Nicholas II. As it happened I was present at every great event in his life down to a short time before the outbreak of the war.

Echoes from the subterranean forge where seismic explosions were being prepared reached us periodically in the halls of the university, and more than once I arranged for a private meeting (*skhodka*) to be held in the auditory of the oriental faculty which, being somewhat distant from

a clergyman of his adopted Church to administer the sacrament to him on his deathbed, should the minister be punishable if he complies? The Council of the Empire, by a considerable majority, answered, "No"; and their arguments were clear and forcible. So plain was the case that even the grand dukes took the side of the majority. But the Tsar, putting down his foot, said, "A clergyman who shall administer the sacrament of his Church to such a man shall be treated as a law-breaker; it is a crime"; and his decision received the force of law. As this declaration of the imperial will was made after the manifesto, we know what to think of the Emperor's tolerant views as mirrored in that document.

This other instance took place also after the promulgation of that "Magna Charta" of Russian liberty. Baron Uexkull von Gildenband proposed that certain sections of the population who had been forced several years ago to join the Orthodox Communion, all of them against their will, and some even without their knowledge, should now be permitted to return to their respective Churches if they chose. Some of these people had been Lutherans of the Baltic provinces, others had been Uniates of western Russia, *i.e.*, Catholics who, with the liturgy of the Greek Church, hold the beliefs of the Latin and are in communion with Rome. It was an act, not of magnanimity, but of common justice that was here suggested. But, when the general debate was about to begin, the Grand Duke Michael, acting in harmony with his Majesty's known dispositions, withdrew from the baron his right to speak in favour of the proposal, which therefore dropped.

Perhaps the most astounding piece of folly for the maintenance of which the Emperor was personally answerable, at any rate during that part of his reign which ended with the Yalu speculation and the Manchurian campaign, was his persecution of a very important section of his own Church, the Old Believers. The members of this denomination, who were numerous, wealthy, conservative, and monarchical, differ only in the veriest trifles from members

of the State orthodoxy. And yet the head of the Orthodox Church and Tsar of all the Russias, who needed for himself, his dynasty, and his Empire all the help he could enlist on the side of autocracy and conservatism, harried those Old Believers as though they were public enemies. I saw a good deal of them at this time, listened to and wrote down their complaints against the Emperor, to whom they remained loyal in spite of his unwise intolerance.

A monastery belonging to this sect<sup>1</sup> was seized by an Orthodox archimandrite who, at the head of fifty Cossacks, drove out the monks and took possession of their dwelling. One of their bishops, Siluan, protested and was thrown into prison. Yet the archimandrite who had won this easy victory, not satisfied with his violence against the living, also wreaked his spite on the dead. Two Old Believers who had departed this life in the odour of sanctity, Bishop Job and the priest Gregory, were reputed to be in heaven; and their bodies were said to be immune from decomposition, a fact which is taken to point to their saintship. But the Old Believers could not be permitted to have miracles or saints. The Orthodox archimandrite, therefore, violated the tombs and dug up the bodies. He found the latter really intact, and breaking their coffins, he saturated the boards with petroleum and then burned the mortal remains of the holy men to ashes.<sup>2</sup> The Tsar had been told of all these grievances, but he made no sign.

A tragic story, the hero of which was Bishop Methodius, one of the pillars of the Old Believers, may help to complete the reader's idea of the cruelty of the system. It, too, was brought to the notice of Tsar Nicholas at the time without eliciting even an expression of regret. Born in Cheliabinsk, Methodius, after having been ordained a priest, zealously discharged the duties of his office for fifteen years before he was raised to the episcopal see of Tomsk. One day as bishop he administered the sacraments to a man who, born in the

<sup>1</sup> The Nikolsky Skeet in the Kuban province.

<sup>2</sup> This procedure was described in the *Grashdanin*, 1896, a newspaper which was read regularly by the Tsar.

State Church, had joined the community of Old Believers. This was precisely a case of the type discussed in the Council of the Empire and so harshly provided for by the Emperor himself. Methodius was denounced, arrested, tried, found guilty, and condemned to banishment in Siberia; and the sentence was carried out with needless brutality. With irons on his feet, penned up together with murderers and other criminals of the worst type, he was sent by *étape* from prison to prison to the government of Yakutsk. Through the intercession of an influential co-religionist, he was allowed to stay in the capital of that province, but soon afterwards, at the instigation of a dignitary of the State Church, he was banished to Vilyuisk, in north-eastern Siberia, a place inhabited by savages. The aged bishop—he was seventy-eight years old—was then set astride a horse, tied down to the animal, and told that he must ride thus to his new place of exile, about seven hundred miles distant. “This sentence is death by torture,” said Methodius’s flock. And they were not mistaken. The old man gave up the ghost on the road (1898); but when, where, and how he died and was buried has never been made known.

To the wholesome chastenings of criticism the Tsar was serenely indifferent. So far as I could learn he never paid heed to any strictures by whomsoever uttered, with the sole exception of those of his imperial consort and of Rasputin. If his repressive measures were conceived without vision and executed without ruth, the occasional attempts he made at constructive work were inspired by vulgar superstition acting upon the intellect of a born dupe. In miracles and marvels he took a childish delight, and was as ready to believe the messages from the invisible world which the spirits sent through M. Philippe in the Crimea as in the wonders wrought by the relics of Orthodox monks whose names he himself added to the bead-roll of Russian saints. His predecessors were more chary of peopling heaven than of colonising Siberia. Nicholas I. assented to the canonisation of Mitrophan of Voronesh (1832), whose body was

## CHAPTER X

### FATHER GAPON AND AZEFF

GEORGE GAPON began his public career by joining one of those amazing organisations which the bureaucracy in the last days of its decline created for its defense. It came of an application of the method of exorcising Beelzebub by Beelzebub. The principle and expediency of borrowing something from the democratic movements of the west to serve as a prop for the autocracy of the east had taken root in the fertile brain of Plehve, the organiser, and he set scores of agents working at various aspects of this fascinating problem. I met several of them. One of these was a certain Zubatoff, who organised the Moscow factory hands into a puissant association under the unavowed supervision and direction of the secret police and in opposition to the inchoate unions directed by the socialists. The project was audacious, for it included the getting up of economic strikes for higher wages and better conditions, which the authorities generally brought to an end by taking sides with the workmen against the employers. To such expedients was the autocracy reduced! I had met Gapon once or twice when calling on Bishop Antoninus, who played a part in the religious Philosophical Society, but I can hardly say that I was acquainted with or impressed by him. I distinctly remember, however, Witte's indignation at the immorality of Zubatoff's expedient, and at the harm it was inflicting on industry. From Moscow bitter complaints had been received from directors and owners of factories, and Witte, appealed to as Finance Minister, took their part unhesitatingly. "It is not for the secret police," he once said to me, "to organise strikes which are forbidden by law. If strikes are desirable, necessary, or permissible, they should be left to the men whose interests are furthered by them." Gapon at first worked under Zubatoff and later alone, and as he confessed to me

when I pressed the question, he had accepted money from the secret police, "but all the money advanced by the government," he argued, "came from the people. And besides, if I had scrupulously refused it, there would have been no great movement now against the regime." His plan and justification, as he explained to others and myself, consisted in his intention to get the factory hands into his power, select the most gifted and trustworthy among them, make them his agents for propaganda, and then when the auspicious hour should strike, to lead the compacted working class to victory over the autocracy. It was the scheme of a visionary who had no eye for realities, the dream of an ambitious and eloquent greenhorn.

The dismissal of four artisans from the Putiloff Works at St. Petersburg<sup>1</sup> was the occasion that led to the procession of Bloody Sunday. Gapon proposed that a demand should be made not only for the reinstatement of the men, but also for the punishment of the foreman who had sent them away, and for guarantees that the existing abnormal relations between employers and employed should be so reformed as to render such abuses as that complained of impossible in the future. If this reasonable request were not complied with, he would not, he said, answer for the maintenance of public tranquillity. The working men were as clay in his hands. His success whenever he addressed them had turned his head and clouded his judgment, for vanity was his besetting sin. In a few days his economic demands were reinforced by political pretensions, and he at last exhorted the men to follow him to the Winter Palace to see the Tsar and lay before him the needs of the entire Russian people. The idea was not his own. Who suggested it I do not know for certain, but I have some grounds for believing, but not enough for asserting, that it had travelled from the far end of the globe, whence money was also arriving.

I called on Gapon a few days before the historic Sunday<sup>2</sup> and being myself acquainted with most of the prominent

<sup>1</sup>In December, 1904.

<sup>2</sup>The procession took place on 22nd January, 1905.

liberals not only in the capital but also in the provinces, I felt curious to ascertain more than I then knew about his aims, means, qualifications, and antecedents. The last-named subject was obviously distasteful to him. He reluctantly admitted as much as he saw that I knew about himself, but his answers generally, as well as the manner in which he gave them, left an unpleasant impression in my mind to which I gave utterance in my estimate of him published next day.<sup>1</sup> I felt that such a man was not fitted to lead the people in a country like Russia, where punishment for abortive revolutions was Draconian, and I never could rid myself of the conviction that he was not to be trusted.

On the eve of the great demonstration I spent the whole night in the company of Maxim Gorky, Kedrin, and a number of liberals, who were indirectly helping Gapon by endeavouring to get the government to keep the troops in barracks on the morrow and to induce the Tsar to receive, or send some one to receive, a delegation of the working men. Witte, who, although not in power, was eager to canalise the current and render it harmless, telephoned to the responsible minister, his friend and mine, Prince Sviatopolk Mirsky, and besought him to intercede with the monarch. To no purpose. Mirsky, who was a humane, straight, honourable man, did everything he could to have the request complied with, but without result. I well remember Witte's last words to Mirsky at the telephone an hour after midnight: "Are you really aware how serious the movement is, and how tragic the consequences of your refusal may be?" And the answer came: "I am alive to all that, but I can do nothing to prevent it. The matter is not in my hands." The delegation then withdrew. Nobody in authority could be discovered in the capital that night who would confess to having any voice in shaping the events of the morrow. Blind fate seemed to be standing at the wheel.

On the Sunday morning I went out to see the demonstration and was very nearly shot by the Cossacks who fired on a body of working men and women a few yards from Witte's

<sup>1</sup>In the *Daily Telegraph*.



house after having hurriedly warned me to vacate the ground between them and the crowd. The people, who were unarmed and peaceful, but excited and wound up by Gapon, were fired upon without ruth.<sup>1</sup> It would have been possible for the Emperor or a grand duke to conciliate them, or for a few hundred policemen to disperse them with truncheons, but counsels of wisdom were rejected, possibly because Witte who tendered them was disliked by the Tsar.

Military specialists afterwards assured me that if the workmen, who reached the neighbourhood of the empty Winter Palace, had been led by a resolute chief they might have occupied it without the loss of a man and perhaps turned the riot into a revolution.<sup>2</sup> I do not share this view, which I record as interesting. For the demonstration was a mad freak. The working men were unarmed, their leader was self-seeking and pacific, the groups, scattered all over the city, could not be concentrated, and the attitude of the crowd was such that the soldiers were certain to disperse it without a serious effort. This was known to Gorky, Kedrin, and myself the night before. The priest failed to realise it.

The Cossacks stationed near the bridges and at other points fired upon the advancing groups and a massacre ensued. The number of victims as given by some English and foreign papers amounted to thousands; in reality the killed did not exceed seventy odd, nor the wounded 240.

Father Gapon in person led a numerous body of men from a part of the city far distant from the Winter Palace, and before they had made much progress they were stopped by the troops who opened fire. Gapon's life was in danger for a while, but he lay flat in the snow enveloped in his heavy fur coat during the firing. One of his friends fell dead by his side. Having escaped the same fate he was taken to a place of safety by a devoted friend, the engineer Ruthenberg, a member of a revolutionary society. It came about in this way.

After the third volley the silence was broken only by the

<sup>1</sup> I described the events of these days in telegrams of many columns in length which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*.

<sup>2</sup> The *Novoye Vremya* also put forward this thesis,

cries and moans of the wounded, who lay wriggling or wincing in the mottled snow. Ruthenberg raised his head cautiously, looked round at the prostrate bodies, and seeing beside him the burly figure of the cleric curled up in the snow, nudged him violently. From the capacious fur mantle Gapon's head was lifted slowly. "Are you alive, father?" "Yes." "Shall we get away from here?" "By all means." And they went. Hardly had they entered a courtyard hard by when Gapon theatrically exclaimed, "There's no longer a God, there's no longer a Tsar." And yet within a twelve-month he was secretly assuring the authorities that his veneration for the Tsar was and always had been profound—in fact, it came immediately after his love for God.

The engineer, eager to save the priest's life as the most precious thing in that motley crowd, took away all the compromising documents in Gapon's possession and asked whether he might also relieve him of his long tell-tale hair. The priest assented. Ruthenberg then took out his clasp knife for the purpose. It was the knife that contained a pair of scissors and was to be employed once again on Gapon at the close of his career and his life and by the same engineer. Ruthenberg began the operation as though it were the ceremony of conferring upon a novice the dignity of monkhood. And the working men, who literally worshipped their leader, clustered round the pair and stretched forth their hands for the locks of the precious hair which they received reverently with bared and bowed heads as though an awe-inspiring sacrament were being administered. And as they took it, they muttered, "It is holy." Those locks of Gapon's hair were treasured up by the working men and their families as sacred relics<sup>1</sup>—for a twelvemonth and a day. From the moment Gapon rose from the ground he was another man in more than one sense of the term. Instead of the enthusiastic leader who had recoiled from no danger he was in mortal terror of being arrested and hanged. Of hanging he had a supernatural dread. It might have been a presentiment.

I saw him that same evening. He came disguised to the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Byloye* (in Russian), Nos. 11-12, p. 35.

Economic Society where a meeting was being held of the intelligentsia, and his unbridled vanity moved him to deliver an address, having first had himself introduced to the audience as a friend of Father Gapon's. He had nothing of interest to tell his audience, but if I remember right he asked that the workmen should be supplied with firearms in order to rebel with success. The historic procession imparted new vigour to the popular movement and the massacre of the unarmed citizens inflicted enormous damage on the cause of the autocracy.

The remainder of Gapon's history had best find a place here. His friend, the engineer Ruthenberg, who saved his life near the Narva Gates, stood by him helpfully with counsel, money, refuge, friends, until he had him safe in Geneva. There and in Paris Gapon's vanity was fed and fostered by the reverence with which the Russian colony received him. He formally joined the socialists, expecting to rise to still greater fame and break the record he had already attained. A lady who had been in Petersburg and on her return from Russia found Gapon still idle and fretting, cheered him up with the information that the workmen of his party in the capital literally adored him and were about to open a subscription to raise a monument to him during his life. These tidings completely upset his mental balance. He communicated them to every one he met, generally with the comment: "It is without parallel in history." His personal magnetism, which drew and captivated many of those who came under his influence, enabled him to live in idleness abroad, supported either by the party or by individuals, until he published the story of his life, for which he is said to have received a thousand pounds. A measure of his powers of suggestion was afforded by the ease with which he talked over a certain Russian with whom he became acquainted abroad into making him a present of fifty thousand francs<sup>1</sup> "to organise the workmen of

<sup>1</sup> The man who gave the money was Sokoff. There were other wealthy Russians who, belonging to no revolutionary party, replenished the funds of the social democrats or social revolutionists, and at least one of these gave as much as a hundred thousand pounds.

Petersburg." This money he is alleged to have spent entirely on himself, and as soon as the party to which he now belonged heard of what he had done and how he had accomplished it they asked him to resign. It is worth noting as a characteristic of the man that about that time, and before six months had elapsed since the events of Bloody Sunday, Gapon had again resumed secret relations with the Russian Department of Police.<sup>1</sup> When in Finland later on, a certain captain remarked to him, "Russia has had her Gapon, but now she needs a Napoleon." He rejoined, "How do you know that that Russian Napoleon is not standing before you now?"

I was once invited to dinner near London by a well-known Russian revolutionist who enjoys an enviable reputation in the higher walks of life. I accepted gratefully. Before the day had come, however, I received another letter informing me that Father Gapon would be the honoured guest of the evening, whereupon I begged to be excused, for I felt an inexplicable antipathy to the man. Later on when he had returned in secret to Russia<sup>2</sup> he sent a message to ask me whether I would meet him. He also apologised for troubling one with whom he could hardly say that he was acquainted, but my close relations with the Prime Minister warranted him, he thought, in taking this unwonted step. I declined to see Gapon on the ground that my intimacy with the Premier would not allow me to enter into relations with an enemy, real or alleged, of the government without first informing its chief and obtaining his assent. Gapon sent again to request me to tell Witte that he was back in St. Petersburg and had something of importance to say.

I brought the matter up that same night after dinner. Witte and I were talking about various people when I asked him his opinion of Gapon, and then inquired when he had last heard of him. "And where is he now?" I queried. "He is still abroad, I suppose." I remarked that to my knowledge he was in the Russian capital. At first the states-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Byloye*, Nos. 11-12, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> I have forgotten the date and my dairies are inaccessible owing to the war.

man thought I was joking. When he saw that I could tell where the priest was to be found he requested me to give him Gapon's address. I did not possess it, nor would I have given it unconditionally if I had had it. I told him, however, how he could get into communication with him, but only after he had first promised me not to allow him to be arrested. Witte apprised me subsequently that he had met his colleague, Durnovo, Minister of the Interior, next day, and that Durnovo had casually mentioned Gapon's name to him. "Gapon is here," said Witte. "Are you certain?" "Quite certain." "Then I must have the scoundrel arrested." "No, no, you must promise not to touch him. I have given my word. I will see to it that he leaves the country." Durnovo reluctantly agreed to give Gapon twenty-four or forty-eight hours' grace, and Witte sent him the necessary money from his own purse to enable him to quit Russia.<sup>1</sup>

I did not know exactly when Gapon entered into relations with Ratchkoffsky, the head of the Political Police of all Russia, who, after having been dismissed for sending a true report about the shady antecedents of the Tsar's first favourite, the French table-rapper, Philippe, was reinstated as the cleverest, most resourceful, and most subtle organiser of anti-revolutionary counter-mines in the Tsardom. And judging by what he actually accomplished he deserved this reputation. I, who for years was Witte's most intimate friend, met him two or three times at the statesman's house and was surprised to note that he spoke Russian with a foreign accent and expressed himself slowly, hesitatingly, as though he were seeking for words. The minister, who was always outspoken to me when characterising the people he received and had warned me in advance to keep clear of several because he suspected them of being spies or blackmailers, expressed himself thus about Ratchkoffsky: "He is well worth knowing. He has an extraordinary, subtle mind. The way he gets round the anarchists is simply amazing." But I fought shy of Ratchkoffsky, and he of me. He probably remembered

<sup>1</sup> This would go to show that Gapon's relations with the police had not yet been regulated, or else were not known to the minister.

my dossier. Anyhow, I have no clear-cut impression of anything but his exterior and his small talk and I found neither attractive.

I have since learned that Gapon had become Ratchkoffsky's paid agent some time in the first half of February, 1906,<sup>1</sup> that he had written a letter of repentance and promise of amendment to the Home Secretary, Durnovo, and had undertaken to seduce and win over to the secret service his friend, the engineer Ruthenberg; and that was his undoing. Ratchkoffsky handled Gapon in a masterly way, flattering him to the top of his bent until the priest began to imagine that he was about to become one of Russia's greatest men. Gapon, on his part, retracted all his former opinions, brand-marked his action of Bloody Sunday, and announced his resolve to make amends for all his former wickedness. That was exactly what the Police Director wanted—to bedraggle the idol of the people with mud and to plunge him in the lowest depths of degradation. It was with this object and probably with the ulterior aim of sending the priest to his death that Ratchkoffsky set him the task of disaffecting Ruthenberg to the revolutionary movement and securing his services as a spy. Ratchkoffsky well knew from Azeff that the engineer had nothing new to reveal, and also that he would turn upon his tempter. Anyhow, it was the persistent effort to achieve that impossible and useless feat that ruined the fickle priest. There is something almost amusing in the *naïveté* with which Gapon, when seeking to lure his friend and saviour, tells of the friendly turn he had done him in his talks with the head of the political police. "At first, you know, Ratchkoffsky did not trust you, but when I assured him that you were straight and honest, and that I would vouch for you, he was easy in mind!" A certificate of straightness and honesty from the traitor for the man whom he hopes to render disloyal comes to a westerner with an anarchist flavour.

<sup>1</sup> Gapon and Ratchkoffsky had met in January once or twice, and also in early February, 1906. Whether the Minister Durnovo was aware of this I am unable to say.

Nothing is more characteristic of the degree of vice and corruption to which the autocracy, and not the autocracy only, had sunk at the beginning of the century than the cynicism with which assassination, cold-blooded treachery, shameless perjury, and all the abominations of applied Machiavellism pushed to its uttermost extremes, were discussed and employed by the State and also by its foes. All restraints and checks were gone. The Tsar's government employed unprincipled scoundrels who, like Azeff, cajoled young men into a secret society, set them to commit dastardly crimes, and then delivered them up to death, penal servitude, or exile, and on the other hand the revolutionary parties were served by the self-same ruffians who proscribed and murdered grand dukes, ministers, generals. And the imperial government, which knew that such murders as those of Plehve and of the Tsar's uncle, the Grand Duke Sergius, had been planned and organised by the well-paid State servant Azeff, not only allowed him to remain in its employ, but continued to pay him royally. These things enable one to gauge the depths to which moral gangrene had eaten into the organism before it finally collapsed. Tsarism was being developed to its extreme consequences.

What could be more artless or illuminating than the following entry made by the engineer Ruthenberg in his diary? "February, 1906. I found nobody in Petersburg. Having learned that Azeff was in Seyversk I repaired thither. I arrived by the first morning train, about 7 a.m. on the 11th or 12th February. I narrated everything to Azeff<sup>1</sup> (about Gapon's treason). I told him that as a member of the party I do not consider that I have the right to take any measures on my own initiative, so I await instructions from the Central Committee. Azeff was astonished and disgusted at what I had recounted. It was his opinion that Gapon should be done to death like a poisonous viper. In order to

<sup>1</sup> Azeff was the notorious revolutionary organiser and at the same time the great police spy—a living synthesis of contradictions. What Ruthenberg told Azeff were the suspicious admissions made to him by Gapon who had already begun the work of seduction.

accomplish this I must ask him to meet me, drive out with him in the evening, taking my own sleigh to the Krestoffsky Garden,<sup>1</sup> remain there to supper and stay late—in fact until everybody is gone—then drive in the same conveyance to the wood, plunge a knife into Gapon's back, and throw his body out of the sleigh. The same morning . . . Subbotin arrived . . . In essentials he shared Azeff's opinion that Gapon must be killed." . . . Another council of four was held next day and opinions were divided, one member insisting on the murder of Azeff alone and the others advocating a meeting of Ruthenberg, Gapon, and Ratchkoffsky at which the engineer should also kill the other two.

Ruthenberg did not venture to assassinate Gapon, who was literally idolised by the working men, until he could get their assent. In order to obtain this it behoved him, in his own interest, first to prove the priest's guilt. With this object in view he took Gapon out in a sleigh, the driver of which was one of the factory hands disguised, who was told in advance to keep his ears pricked, listen to the conversation, and report it faithfully to his comrades. The talk consisted of Ruthenberg's various objections to Gapon's proposal that he should meet Ratchkoffsky and betray his party, and of Gapon's detailed answers and persuasive pleas. The priest had at first mentioned ten thousand pounds as the reward which the engineer might expect for his treason, but was afterwards obliged to confess that the head of the political police had refused to pay more than one quarter of this sum.

Naturally the talk was very open, the names of persons being clearly pronounced by Ruthenberg so that the driver heard enough to dispel his doubts. He and his comrades having subsequently talked the matter over, decided at the first opportunity to seize Gapon, disarm, try, and execute him. And for these purposes a wooden house was hired some ten or twelve miles outside the capital, on the way to the Finnish frontier, into which he was to be inveigled. It

<sup>1</sup> A place of amusement on one of the islands, where officers and *bons vivants* used to sup, listen to gypsy songs, and spend most of the night.



was situated in a little village of wooden houses used as summer dwellings by the poorer middle class of the capital and left empty in winter. Gapon, however, at first refused to leave Petersburg under any circumstances, but finally accepted Ruthenberg's invitation and went without even taking the revolver which he had never before left behind. After some conversation with the engineer the pair approached the shanty, in which a number of workmen were secretly waiting to discharge the functions of judges and executioners.

"Is there anybody in the house?" asked Gapon as they drew near to the dismal-looking frail, wooden structure in the deserted snow-covered village. "Nobody," replied his friend. "Bravo!" rejoined the priest, "you always manage to get a place where even a dog would not scent your presence." The members of the improvised areopagus were meanwhile waiting in a little backroom on the upper story, and by way of disarming suspicion the door had been shut and a padlock hung outside as though it had remained locked ever since the end of summer when all these shabby "villas" are vacated. The plan was for Ruthenberg and Gapon to enter this particular room where the priest would be disarmed, bound, and tried. But Gapon, arriving first, went into the larger room, took off his fur coat, flopped heavily down on the sofa, and began to chatter away more cynically than ever before, fancying that no one but his friend could hear him, whereas his every word was audible to the men next door. "Why ever won't you come to terms?" he began; "25,000 roubles is a respectable sum." "Yes, yes, but in Moscow you told me that Ratchkoffsky had offered 100,000." And so more and more compromising answers were elicited by the engineer's tricky questions. For example, the latter objected that if he betrayed his comrades they would be hanged and he therefore recoiled from the act. Gapon urged that once the money was paid by the authorities, the two could then warn their comrades to escape and thus save the lambs and feed the wolves. His friend then insisted that this was not feasible because they would be

"shadowed" by Ratchkoffsky's detectives and all of them hanged. "Oh, well, we will arrange their escape somehow," remarked the ex-priest. "Perhaps part might get away," said Ruthenberg, "but they'll surely catch and hang the rest." "That would be a pity," observed Gapon. And so the fateful dialogue ran on.

In this way the wretched man was tempted and played with for the space of about half an hour, until he had laid bare all his crimes against the men who had followed him and braved death under his leadership and had denied God and the Tsar at his bidding a little over a year before. Towards the close of this oblique cross-examination the engineer struck out a new line in order to reach a climax. "What would become of you if the workmen, say only those of your own section, got wind of your relations with Ratchkoffsky?" "They know nothing about that, and if they heard anything I would make them believe that I was doing it for their own good." "Yes, but suppose they were to discover all that I know about you? . . . that you betrayed me and even undertook to seduce me and enlist me among the provocateurs and through me to betray the militant organisation, and that you sent a letter of repentance to Durnovo? What then?" "Nobody knows those things, nobody can ever find them out." "But suppose I myself were to publish them?" "Oh, of course you would never do such a thing. . . ." Then having meditated a while, "And if you did I would write to the papers and say you had gone mad and that I knew nothing of those things. Besides, you possess no documents, no witnesses to bear them out. There isn't the shadow of a doubt that it is I whom they would believe."<sup>1</sup>

After this they moved out of the room. Behind a door Gapon came upon an ear witness, was terrified, and wanted to kill him on the spot. Thereupon Ruthenberg went to the door of the little room, pushed it open, and turning to the priest exclaimed, "Look! there are my witnesses!" Gapon, turning his gaze upon the man whom he had been

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Byloye*, Nos. 11-12, p. 89.

talking to as his second self, fell on his knees, and exclaimed, "Martin,<sup>1</sup> Martin!" "There's no Martin here for you!" exclaimed a voice. The workmen, who had with difficulty repressed their fury during Gapon's unwitting self-accusation, threw themselves fiercely upon him now and pinned him to the floor. Then they dragged him into the adjoining room. Ruthenberg covered his face with his hands and went out. The first impulse of the men was to shoot the traitor. But he tore himself from their clutches in the strength of his despair and adjured them to have mercy. "Brothers, brothers!" he implored them. "We are not your brothers. Ratchkoffsky is your brother." "Brothers, I swear to you that I did it for the sake of an idea . . ." "Yes, we have just heard your ideas. We know them now." "Comrades, in the name of the past, forgive me . . . in the name of the past." But the men went on tying his hands and feet in silence. "Brothers! Spare me. Remember the links that bind us to each other." "That's exactly why you deserve to die," one of the men exclaimed. "You sold our blood to the secret police and you merit death." . . . And congruously with an unspoken accord they threw the noose over his head on to his neck and pulled him over to an iron hook which had been driven into the clothes-rack.

Gapon, already choking and gasping, croaked out, "Brothers . . . darlings . . . stop! . . . Let me say a last word!" . . . "String him up!" commanded one of the men who had walked with Gapon in the procession of Bloody Sunday. But another comrade interposed, saying, "Let him have his last word as he asks for it. Perhaps we may learn something important." . . . The pressure of the cord round his neck was eased and Gapon spoke, "Brothers! . . . Have mercy . . . Dear ones . . . Forgive me . . . For the sake of bygone times." . . . But the workmen jerked the cord and Gapon hung powerless. A few minutes later he was dead. The shadows of evening were falling.

<sup>1</sup> Martin was Ruthenberg's adopted pseudonym in the revolutionary society. The story of Gapon's last moments I have told in the exact words of Ruthenberg himself and of one of the workmen who executed the priest.

The workmen, gloomy and stern, went out of the room one after the other on to the terrace where Ruthenberg stood. He was trembling all over from an attack of nerves. "Is it finished?" he asked. All were silent. "You should search him now," he said. And they all went back to the room again where Gapon's corpse was hanging. They searched him and found various papers in his pockets. . . . Ruthenberg said, "You ought to cover his face. Cut the cord and cover up his face." He took from his own pocket and handed me a clasp knife—writes a workman—which contained a pair of small, collapsible scissors. "It was with these very scissors," he remarked, "that I cut his hair on that day . . . the 22nd January . . . and now it is with the same scissors that" . . . but he did not complete the sentence and went out of the dismal room.<sup>1</sup>

In this dramatic manner poetic justice was done and the idol of the people was covered with infamy.

Azeff, the paid spy of the government and unmatched organiser of revolutionary murders, was a party to this execution. A word from him would have stopped or retarded it. That he informed his chief Ratchkoffsky of what was planned is most probable. For Gapon, after his meeting with Ruthenberg at the fatal village of Ozerky, was to have returned and given Ratchkoffsky an account of what took place. And as he did not return the conclusion that he had been put to death was almost unavoidable. Yet Gapon's body was allowed to lie for weeks in the empty house where it had fallen, probably because Ratchkoffsky was anxious that the crime should be discovered as late as possible. From the outset the Police Director knew that Gapon had nothing of importance to reveal and was perfectly useless as a spy, because the revolutionists had long ceased to trust him. What he wanted, therefore, was first to discredit the popular hero of Bloody Sunday—which he had already done—and then to get the revolutionists to give him a receipt for the work by putting their ex-hero to death ignominiously. Conception and execution were worthy of the greatest of Russia's

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Byloye*, Nos. 11-12, p. 119.

secret police organisers. They were also characteristic of the government, the regime, and the epoch.

As soon as I received tidings of Gapon's death<sup>1</sup> I asked Witte whether it was true. He seemed greatly perturbed and only said, "I cannot credit it. But I will find out at once and let you know." The next morning as he and I went in to lunch together he said, "I am sorry to say that Gapon has been put to death. Your information was correct. Please say nothing about it to any one. What a strange man he was!" He then told me the whole story of Gapon as far as he knew it and I wrote it down to his dictation.

Thus the system of government at the outset of the twentieth century was essentially what Ivan the Terrible had made it in the sixteenth—an agency independent of the nation, with interests and aims of its own which often ran counter to those of the people, an organism which had the strongest motives for keeping the bulk of Russians in intellectual darkness, political subjection, and in the plague-polluted gloom of moral degradation. And now that the girders and joists of the State structure were bending and giving way under the battering shocks of terrorists who lived and died for abstractions, the props by which the fabric was being supported were supplied by Ratchkoffsky, Gapon, Azeff, Tennenbaum, and such-like beings whose very breath shed poison and from whose infamous deeds some of the worst criminals of the west would have recoiled. By the year of the abortive revolution, which foreboded the fall of the autocracy, the soul of the ruling class in the Tsardom was encrusted round with foul leprous stains and the moral atmosphere of the nation permeated with corrosive vapour. Brother could no longer confide in brother nor parents in their sons, so impregnated had the air become with suspicion and mistrust.

Take as a typical example the case of the notorious Azeff. A great clumsy, brawny fellow with a big Marat-like head, and uncommonly low forehead, eyes that seemed starting from

<sup>1</sup> As my diaries are no longer accessible, I am unable to determine the exact date.

their sockets, thick lips, very high cheek bones, and a coarse, sensual look, he was early taken in hand by the Department of the Political Police and introduced into the holy of holies of the revolutionary party, there to weave plots that made men shudder, to enlist intrepid, clever young men—the pick of Russia's youth—to assign to them parts in political murders, and to have them arrested on the eve of their realisation and sent to the gallows, Siberia, or a horrible prison. The police alone being unable to cope with the multitude of patriotic lads who, stirred by the spectacle of their country's woes, and inspired by the vision of its future bliss, rose up against the accursed system, created the rôle of the agent provocateur. Ratchkoffsky raised it to the dignity of an art. The number of provocateurs was great, but the king of them all was Yevno Azeff, known also as the "Fat One." The story of the exploits of this miscreant would fill a large volume. The names of his victims would suffice for a national martyrology. The authority he enjoyed with the militant revolutionists on the one hand, and with the Tsar's bureaucratic defenders on the other hand, constitutes a psychological wonder. For although the man had no such charm of person or magic of language as Gapon possessed, and was physically repellent over and above, he was so highly esteemed and trusted by both sides that for years the central committee of the revolutionists refused to entertain the growing suspicions of certain of his colleagues, or to take notice of the downright denunciations that came from the Department of the Political Police itself, while the Tsar's government, even after it had been proven that Azeff was the double-dyed scoundrel who had organised the successful plot against Plehve and the Grand Duke Sergius, not only refused to bring him to trial or otherwise punish him, but continued to pay him largely and to keep him in their employment. Azeff was a Janus, and each of his two faces possessed the power of fascinating the beholder.

Azeff accepted two influential posts in the revolutionary camp: he was a member of the central committee of the Social Revolutionary Party, and he was also head of the

militant organisation, so that practically everything was thought out, organised, and its execution supervised by him. For seven or eight consecutive years all the threads of the revolutionary movement passed through his blood-stained hands; he knew personally every leading conspirator in the province, and shaped every great collective terrorist act. It is self-evident that the revolutionists, whose watchfulness and shrewdness need no eulogium, would not have maintained him in this position of trust if they had not had absolute confidence in his zeal for the cause and his resourcefulness. It is no less clear that he must have justified this confidence by concrete acts. These two conclusions are borne out by well-established facts. Of these evidences of Azeff's devotion one of the most resonant and fruitful was the death of Plehve, of which I by chance was a witness. This versatile ruffian carefully laid his plans for the murder of the minister in whom the brightest hopes of the autocracy were then centred and who was paying him for protection against terrorist plots. It is worth noting by the way that Plehve was one of the highest types of the champions of Tsarism and a statesman of no mean order. True, the material in which he worked and the conditions which he was forced to accept made it not only impossible for him to achieve great palpable results, but obliged him either to abandon the task or to have recourse to the most infamous devices ever employed by a civilised ruler of men. And yet ethically Plehve was neither worse nor better than the common run of his class. Intellectually indeed he was far and away their superior. But the system which he had to bolster up was already so putrid that it could be upheld only by communicating its rottenness to the forces that were preparing to attack it. Any powerful shock would, it seemed to him and to many of his fellow-workers, overthrow the dynasty, the regime, and the entire ordering of the political community. The diversion which he had striven to create by the Manchurian campaign was harming in lieu of helping the autocracy. For the first time all Russia was combining against the Tsarist State, and any day a far-resonant

crime of the terrorists might prove the precipitating event that would lead to its overthrow. To hinder this the surest way, as it seemed to Plehve, would be to contaminate the terrorists with the canker from which the State was suffering. In this way the system assimilated its servants and stamped them with the hall-mark of its own ethical quality.

Plehve was blown to pieces in my pressence, and forthwith Azeff became a demi-god in the eyes of his comrades and a future saviour in the eyes of the government. Unable to satisfy both masters at once, he soon afterwards plotted the death of the Tsar's uncle and had him too blown to pieces. It is not surprising, therefore, that when in the latter half of the year 1905 he was anonymously denounced to one of the terrorists as an agent of the political police the revolutionary committee dismissed the charge with supreme contempt. And yet the denunciation had come in the shape of a letter sent<sup>1</sup> by an unnamed official of the Department of the Secret Police<sup>2</sup> in Petersburg. Moreover, it consisted not merely in an accusation uttered without evidence; it made two definite statements of interest to the terrorists, which on inquiry turned out to be true, and ought therefore to have stimulated curiosity about the third. It alleged that among the members of the committee were two agents provocateurs, of whom one was T., who had recently returned from Siberia, where he had lived in banishment, and that the other was commonly known by either of his two nick-names, "the Fat One" or "Ivan Nikolayevitch." The indictment actually specified some of the denunciations which each of the two men had made against his comrades, and it also described certain details by which they might be identified. It asserted, for example, that "the Fat One" had recently spent a fortnight in Moscow under the false name of Vilenkin. This last allegation was both true and disquieting.

The member of the committee who had received this letter showed it at once to Azeff, who grew pale and excited,

<sup>1</sup> In August, 1905.

<sup>2</sup> Okhranka.



and exclaimed, "T. is Tataroff, and A. is, of course, myself, Azeff." He decided to repair to Moscow without delay, where he opened his mind to another member of the party, who comforted him by expressing his implicit trust in his loyalty and zeal. It was obvious, this comforter said, that Ratchkoffsky and the government were burning to deprive the revolutionists of the soul of their organisation, of the man who had removed first Plehve and then the Grand Duke Sergius, and given an irresistible impetus to things political which would carry Russia far towards her goal. Another member of the party, however, brooded over the accusation, and was deeply impressed by the fact that Azeff's false name was known to the police—for that could only mean either that somebody had informed against him—and then why did the police not arrest him?—or else that he himself had informed the police, and then he was their agent. Other explanation there could be none. And yet . . . The second thing that struck this comrade was that the inquiry opened into the case against Tataroff showed that the anonymous writer had told the truth, for the accusation was proved and the traitor was duly put to death by the organisation. Now if one of the two denounced members was guilty, was not the presumption grounded that the other was equally so? But the committee scouted the notion as an insult. Had not Azeff planned the murder of Plehve and the grand duke? And if so, what more need be said? No government would keep an active terrorist like him in its employ.

In the spring of 1906 in revolutionary circles the rumour was rife that an attempt would shortly be made on the life of Admiral Dubassoff, with whom I was then and afterwards on friendly terms. A fortnight before the date fixed, a female member of the revolutionary party from Moscow sought out the mistrustful member of the organisation<sup>1</sup> and narrated a curious incident. She told him that the

<sup>1</sup> I am quoting from his own account, cf. *Byloye*, 9-10, p. 191, also from a pamphlet entitled "The Responsibility of the Tsar," by Vlad. Burtzeff (in Russian), 1910, pp. 11 fol.

conspirators were at their posts the day before when they were suddenly encircled by spies, so that it needed all their presence of mind and energy to make good their escape. Consequently the police knew all about the conspiracy, and the conspirators were in its power. The man to whom this fact was communicated ascribed the laying of the spy trap to Azeff, who intended to make use of the plot against Dubassoff's life for the ruin of a large number of the hardest terrorists. He was therefore in favour of an inquiry. But the terrorists preferred to wait and see. Azeff was now on his mettle, and eight or ten days later the attempt on the admiral's life did take place; he was wounded and deprived of his hearing, and his aide-de-camp, Count Konovnitzin, was killed outright. Azeff, who was hard by during the bomb-throwing, was arrested by the police, but he showed them his passe-partout and they set him at liberty at once. It is difficult to realise that such infamies as these were tolerated, nay, deliberately practised, by civilised Christian men as methods of educating their 180,000,000 wards.

In the autumn of 1906 Azeff took offence at some remarks made by a comrade, and laying down his functions for a time went abroad. During his absence the terrorists improved the occasion and killed more men of note in the administration in one month than they had slain in six months of his tenure of office. And this difference was duly noted by two suspicious comrades, who drew their own conclusions. As soon as Azeff returned<sup>1</sup> he resumed his functions, reorganised the central board, went to Finland, and left instructions that every young member coming from the provinces for advice or work from him should repair thither. These instructions, which aroused surprise, were carried out. There the workers were cordially received and told what was expected of them, and when they returned they were arrested on the Finnish frontier by the Russian police and handed over to the gaoler or the hangman. A large number of young men were caught in this way and immobilised by imprisonment or death. After a time the

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning of 1907.

provincial terrorist chiefs refused to repair to Finland, even when Azeff himself sent for them. Some of his mistrustful colleagues now felt surer of their ground.

But it was not until February, 1908, that the eyes of the committee men began to be opened to the true nature of Azeff's activity. It came about in this way. A young man in a provincial town learned from an intimate friend who was in the service of the secret police that there was an agent provocateur in the committee whose name was Azeff. The youth at once set out for Finland and apprised the committee of what he had heard. But he was sharply bidden to return whence he had come and to mind his own business in future. A few days later a large number of arrests were made by the government, which was impolitic enough to announce that they had received detailed information compromising all those who had been apprehended. Who had given the information? was the question that naturally presented itself to those who were most nearly concerned. "It must have been Azeff," said one who knew him, but he honestly admitted that he was merely guessing. The others refused to entertain the thought. Then said the first, "As our young men are all falling into the hands of the government, why does not Azeff at least suspend the reign of terror must be continued. The honour of Russia demands be opposed to any such suspension. He had said, "The terror must be continued. The honour of Russia demands it." And it was continued.

His mistrustful comrades, and Burtzeff in particular, brooded over these things and resolved to bide their time and watch for their opportunity. As an agent provocateur one of Azeff's functions was to hatch grandiose plots from time to time which required the services of numerous conspirators, to assign to each one his part, and to allow the preparations to be completed and generally the day to dawn on which the execution was to take place. This was an essential condition. Then, and not before, the secret police were to swoop down on the conspirators, seize the ring-leaders red-handed, track the others to the houses of their

friends, and make an enormous haul. In this way during the first four years that followed the abortive revolution of 1905 the executioner was kept continually busy. Thousands of young men, enterprising, fearless, and easily led, were gathered together in groups and flung to the hangman. Azeff would explain these mishaps to his comrades as consequences of the clumsiness of one or other of the conspirators, of their neglect to carry out his instructions, of their consequent imprudence in deed or word. It was always they who were to blame, and it was his part to feel grieved to death at their foolishness. His judgments on his victims were invariably harsh. They themselves were always at fault. His conduct towards the others was equally callous and cruel. In the intervals between these frequent harvests of death, a number of young terrorists, eager for something to do, would be informed that their services were not required for the time being and that they must wait and lie low until they received further instructions. These instructions, however, would either not be issued at all or not for a long period, during which these unemployed young men, who had no means of subsistence, were left literally to starve. For many of them had no profession, no trade, no training, and very often no passports, so that even if employment were offered them they could not profit by it. The funds of the revolutionary organisation were enormous—to my knowledge one donation amounted to over a million roubles, and the cabinet of the day intended to have the donor tried and executed, when they learned that he had committed suicide. But Azeff had the disposal of all moneys, and it was he who tightened the purse strings when solicited to contribute to the support of the starving executors of his sanguinary behests. So widespread and intense were the hardships to which these wretched men were exposed that special kitchens were opened in Finland, at which they could obtain a meal gratuitously. In these ways Azeff, the revolutionary genius, played the game of the government most successfully and spread demoralisation whithersoever he went. And the

system of which he discharged but one of the functions, hardened, narrowed, and brutalised the thinking public throughout the Tsardom.

The Emperor has been held responsible for that system. And in a sense he accepted the responsibility. He was aware of the infamous nature of the services which Azeff rendered and was paid for. Burtzeff had publicly accused Ratchkoffsky and Gerassimoff, who were Azeff's superiors, of connivance at these abominable crimes and of scattering social solvents broadcast for no object worth having. In Paris, London, and New York he had published these accusations. The Duma had taken the subject up and discussed it. The ministers had read and answered questions about Azeff and his victims. I myself had spoken of him to Stolypin, Witte, Durnovo, Schwanebach, Kurloff, and several of their colleagues. They must, therefore, have known and did know exactly for what kind of services he was being paid, and also how he stood with the two hostile parties. Yet they made no protest. The truth is that the atmosphere was impregnated with mephitic gases to which most people had grown accustomed. Neither Stolypin nor any other average minister could alter the state of things. The circumstance required downright fierce resistance or whole-hearted adherence. And they chose the latter.

The fact is that the whole system was essentially immoral. The bureaucracy was an organism outside the nation, living upon it parasitically, interested in obscuring its views, in clouding its judgment, in impairing or even destroying its self-reliance, in a word it resembled in fundamentals the opritchina of Ivan the Terrible. The main structural differences between the Muscovy of those early times and the Russia of the last two Romanoffs<sup>1</sup> consisted in the insurmountable obstacle to centralisation which had been raised by the emancipation of the serfs, coupled with the

<sup>1</sup> The house of the Romanoffs became extinct after the death of the Tsaritsa Elizabeth I. The house that reigned since them is that of Holstein-Gotthorp. Elizabeth's nephew, Peter III., was the first sovereign of this dynasty.

refusal of the government to allow part of the work of administration to devolve upon the zemstvos, the changes necessitated by Witte's efforts at industrialisation, and the increase in the number of "intellectuals" from whom the bureaucracy and the revolutionary party were recruited. Of one section of the intelligentsia the principal occupation in the Empire was to spread foreign theories, to sow new and dissolvent ideas, to seduce officials, soldiers, sailors, to hatch conspiracies, and prepare a revolution. Another momentous difference was supplied by the changed atmosphere of Europe which had become much more favourable to the diffusion of democratic ideas. But the spirit of the ruling class had undergone no modification. The bureaucracy—now supreme and irresponsible—was solicitous about its own interests which were taken to stand for those of the entire community, and as opposition to these interests was intenser than ever before, the old traditional methods were no longer efficacious. The last vestiges of moral barriers had, therefore, been pulled down and the agents of the State went to work with marvellous thoroughness and absolute unscrupulousness.

The most perfect types of these latter-day defenders of the autocracy were Plehve, and his agents Ratchkoffsky, Zubatoff, Gapon, and among the consequences of the system were the meeting of the two extremes, the effacement of the line of demarcation between the reaction and the revolution, the employment of the same agents for crimes devised for the support of the autocracy and for its overthrow, the identification of heinous deeds and praiseworthy exploits, the confusion of evil and good. Thus the State authorities shrank from nothing. In the provinces and sometimes, it is said, in Moscow and Petersburg, torture was resorted to methodically to extort confessions. Several cases which occurred in the provinces came under my cognisance at the time, one of which made a deep impression on me because the central authorities, to whose notice I brought the matter, could only assure me that they were not directly responsible for the "hasty deeds of provincial agents working under

constant fear of death. The chief of the district of Novominsk was killed <sup>1</sup> and four men were arrested on suspicion. They denied all participation in the crime. Then it was decided to put them to the torture. Unable to hold out they made confessions which were used against them and were put to death. It afterwards turned out that they were not guilty of the deed. The real murderer was discovered. He confessed and was executed. The ministers to whose notice I brought these facts, which they could not deny, regretted them, but found them explicable and excusable in the circumstances.

During the first days after Bloody Sunday the government intensified the measures of repression. In particular it was strictly forbidden to collect money for the surviving victims of the massacre. Harmless literary men, professors, and journalists were imprisoned, and 500 cells were got ready in the fortress. General Trepoff was appointed to be a sort of dictator with his residence in the Winter Palace, and everybody expected a reign of terror. Gapon, who had received a false passport, succeeded in escaping. But with true Russian suddenness, Trepoff reversed the machine and did exactly what everybody thought he would never think of doing. In a jiffy he became more liberal than the liberals, set free the men of letters, journalists, professors, and others who were interned in the fortress, and left the 500 newly prepared cells empty. Nay, more, he persuaded the Tsar himself to open a subscription in aid of the widows and orphans of the slain with a donation of fifty thousand roubles. People thought he had gone mad. He was only moved by one of the hidden springs that play such a large part in Russian psychology, which knows not finality and reckes not of coherency.

Public feeling against the Tsar and his advisers now ran high. The Zemsky Assembly of Kharkoff in an address plainly told him that the violation of the nation's elementary rights was unchaining a tempest of bloody civil war which would subvert his throne. "Do not trust, sire, to negligent

<sup>1</sup> In 1906. Trustworthy evidence of torture for political purposes in Petersburg I had none.

and wily servants, but repose confidence in the elected representatives of the nation." From all corners of the Empire came petitions, addresses, resolutions in the same sense. In the meanwhile, the secret revolutionary committee condemned General Trepoff and the Grand Duke Sergius to death, and published the sentence in leaflets, one of which I received.

Police, gendarmes, detectives, and spies were unavailing to save the grand duke, who, perhaps because he anticipated their powerlessness, took the wise precaution of driving and walking without his consort. He knew he was doomed to die by violence, and he faced his doom like a man. He had been for years the embodiment of the vital principle of the autocracy. Therefore he was first on the list of the proscribed. He had misruled Moscow with a rod of iron; he had persecuted the Jews with a degree of hatred akin to mania. Nothing that he said or did seemed inspired by ethical motives or shaped by considerations of justice. He despised soft-heartedness, ignored scruples, and went straight to the goal regardless of consequences.

One of his last acts was to give currency to the statement that Japanese gold had bribed the Russian people to cease work, hamper the government, and co-operate with the public enemy. The accusation was badly worded. The gold was but a help, not a stimulant. His adjutant, Djunkoffsky, took the telegram containing that terrible accusation to a newspaper office in Moscow, strove hard to have it accepted, and finally caused it to be circulated in St. Petersburg, where, although not printed, it was used to envenom public feeling against him. That the Japanese had money distributed among Russian revolutionists of a certain grade and that considerable sums were laid out in this way is, I am bound to say, certain, just as German money has been circulating among them ever since August, 1914. I know the names of some of those who distributed it.

The degree of responsibility that weighs upon the Tsar personally has often been debated, and the consensus of opinion, Russian and foreign, was that he was kept in



ignorance of what was being done in his name and was not only weak-willed but feeble of intellect as well. Against this view my articles in the years 1904-7 were directed. For I knew personally many of the persons who unfolded to him in great detail the condition of the country and the changing moods of the people during most of the crises that marked his reign. I also read and copied hundreds of the annotations which he himself scribbled on the State papers laid before him for cognisance or signature. I had seen and described the manuscript journal which was diligently prepared for him every day and which contained adequate accounts of the various political and other movements of the time. And I had the corroborative testimony of a number of his ministers. From these and other sources I drew the conclusion that Nicholas II., who was nowise devoid of intelligence but only of social sympathy, was profoundly convinced that he was the vicar of God upon earth, and the spiritual leader, not merely of the Russian people, but of the civilised races of mankind to whom he had given light and leading at The Hague. Flatterers at home and abroad, along with a rare faculty for self-hypnotisation, confirmed him in that belief.

Much of his time he spent in his cabinet at what he termed work, which consisted in signing replies to addresses of loyalty elicited by his own agents and penning comments on the various reports presented by ministers, governors, and other officials. His courtiers encouraged him to believe that all these replies and desultory remarks were words of wisdom to be preserved for future ages, and he had some grounds for believing them, seeing that even such trivial remarks as, "I am very glad," "God grant it may be so," were, when possible, published in large type in the newspapers, artistically glazed over in the manuscript, and carefully preserved in the archives like the relics of a saint. But the most interesting were never published; and to these there was no end. Here is one. During the Manchurian campaign a report of the negotiations respecting the warship *Manchur* was laid before him by Count Lamsdorff. The tenor of it was that the Chinese authorities had summoned

the *Manchu* to quit the neutral harbour of Shanghai at the repeated and urgent request of the Japanese consul there. On the margin of that report his Majesty penned the words, "The Japanese consul is a scoundrel."

When I was with Witte at Portsmouth (U.S.A.), the statesman sent a telegram to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Lamsdorff, suggesting that Japan's claim to retain half of the island of Sakhalien and to receive a certain money compensation for the other half should be seriously considered. This telegram was laid before the Emperor, who, as I afterwards learned, wrote upon it: "Neither a rood of land nor a rouble shall Japan receive. From this position nothing will ever make me recede."

I possess a large collection of these childish remarks as well as copies of many of his letters to ministers and others on public affairs, and it was partly from these, coupled with his public acts, that I drew my estimate of his character. Some of his comments on the course of public justice when it was being systematically deflected from its right course by the obsequiousness of court flunkeys bear out the charge of a-morality and callousness which I ventured to reproduce at the outset. One of these glosses, taken in connection with the correspondence that preceded it, is an act of protection extended to deliberate assassination, perpetrated for the purpose of removing real or supposed adversaries of the autocracy. I fear it is not possible to acquit the monarch of this damaging charge. Into this amazing action of the Tsar I inquired all the more fully because, as already stated, the third assassination—two men had been successfully murdered, of whom one was an old friend and the other an old acquaintance of mine—would have sent me also to the shades had it been carried out.

All that need be said here is that the Emperor intervened personally in writing—I possess his exact words among my documents—to ward off the sword of justice from the criminals-in-chief.

## CHAPTER XI

### WITTE CONDEMNED TO DIE

ONE of the most repulsive sides of the reaction of 1906-7 and of the autocratic regime that engendered it was laid bare in the course of the investigations which took place in the latter year into the various attempts made on Witte's life. Incidentally the iniquity of the hidden workings of Tsarism burst fitfully into the light and caused even Witte's faith to waver in the viability of the regime. Those inquiries were both official and private, and the records of them passed through my hands. I knew the names and possessed photographs of the would-be assassins, and I telegraphed accounts of their misdeeds to London in the hope of having the penitent criminal sent to Russia for public trial, and for the exposure of the crimes of his employers—people in high places—in accordance with his own desire. The friends of the Tsar had come to the conclusion that the autocracy would wither and die unless the man who had concluded peace with Japan and constrained the Emperor to create the Duma were done to death.

Witte was the one statesman who had arisen in Russia since the days of Peter. He pursued a fairly coherent policy, just to the past, congruous with the present, anticipatory of the future. Its immutable postulate was peace in Europe and the world. In vain he had endeavoured to carry it out against the insurmountable difficulties created by the Tsar and the Tsar's environment, but even in the face of these he had prevented one war and ended another. Perceiving the impossibility of saving the Tsardom from anarchy or the population from ruin under the prevailing regime, he had worked hard and not unsuccessfully to modify it, and to him the credit or the blame of having extorted the October constitution from Nicholas II. was universally attributed. The achievements he had thus effected despite vast obstacles

stirred the admiration of all who were capable of appreciating them.

But for the Tsarist State it was expedient that Witte should die. And he was accordingly condemned to be assassinated. The sentence was passed, not by revolutionists—these had no grievance against him—but by an association of reactionaries subventioned by the court and patronised by the Emperor. It was the statesman's belief that if these reactionaries had had among them men who like the terrorists were prepared to die for their idea, they could have made away with him quickly, but being mostly drawing-room plotters they depended upon mercenaries to deal the death-stroke and face the danger. That was why one of them, Kazantseff by name, deluded two or three shallow-brained louts of anti-Tsarist leanings into believing that he represented the revolutionary executive which had condemned certain traitors to die. He then exhorted them to render a valuable service to the cause by carrying out the sentence. The dull-witted bumpkins acquiesced and killed B. Yollo, an old friend of mine, a brilliant publicist and member of the first Duma who had just invited me to Moscow. He was shot dead in the broad daylight. A friend of his, also an old acquaintance of mine, Herzenstein, was likewise put to death by Kazantseff's orders.

Witte's destruction was devised with method and deliberation. A plan of his house was made and two infernal machines timed to explode at 9 a.m. were lowered down the chimney. Although filled with high explosives which would have riven the entire wall of the building, the machines, owing to a defect in the works, did not explode.<sup>1</sup>

The next attempt was better devised. When the ex-Premier was getting into his motor, bombs were to be thrown at him. And as I accompanied him, I should have shared his fate.

One Friday morning<sup>2</sup> everything was carefully planned

<sup>1</sup> I held one of them in my hands and carried it downstairs in presence of Witte and of the chief police agent.

<sup>2</sup> On the 7th June, 1907.

for the crime, which was to have been committed on the following day after lunch at about half-past one. And if the plan had been realised the Premier and myself would have been assassinated. A soothsayer, Witte remarked, might on that Friday noon have foretold my future with perfect truth in some such words as these: "Your life is in danger. The danger is imminent, and the chances that you will escape it are exceedingly slight. The assassins are two, their immediate employer is one, behind him is the greatest power in the Empire watching, winking, shielding. They have already been employed on similar jobs. Your friend Yollo was one of their victims. This time they are to blow up a motor-car in which you will be seated, you and a distinguished statesman. The appointed time is to-morrow. He and you have one and only one hope of escape. It is not in the unsuccessful explosion—that is eliminated, for the bombs are powerful. It depends upon a much less likely contingency. In order that you should come off with your life to-morrow, it is necessary that the employer, who is safe and sound and sure of success, should be beheaded by one or both of his assistants. Nothing else will avail you ought. The outlook is dismal."

That forecast, had it been uttered on Friday, would have dovetailed with the facts exactly. For the plot was to be executed on the following day by the two murderers, who from a tavern opposite Witte's house were to advance and throw highly explosive bombs at the motor as he entered. There was nobody to hinder them. But in the meantime one of the would-be assassins, Feodoroff, an ignorant dull-witted lad, had acquired the conviction that he was being duped by Kazantseff who, posing as a Bolshevik, had told him that it was the Revolutionary Party that had condemned Witte to die for having betrayed it by arresting some of its members.

The truth was that Kazantseff was himself the paid agent of an official in the government service, and they both belonged to the band of reactionaries known as the League of the Russian People patronised by the Tsar.

One of the would-be bomb-throwers, Feodoroff, had for

some time suspected that he was being hoodwinked. After having murdered a man described to him as a reactionary he learned from the newspapers that his victim was one of the most promising Liberal Parliamentarians and publicists in the Empire, B. Yollo, whereupon he asked his employer, Kazantseff, for explanations. As the explanations only half satisfied him, he and his companion kept a watch on their suborner who next urged them to assassinate a man named Dr. Belsky and then Count Witte. But opening a drawer of his table one day during his temporary absence, one of the murderers found convincing proof among the papers there that Kazantseff was a member of the reactionary society known as the League of the Russian People. Thereupon he decided to kill him. At first Saturday was the day fixed.

I was lunching with Witte on that day and on my arrival he said, "I must leave the house immediately after lunch to-day, for there is a sitting of the Council of the Empire at which I want to be present. You and I shall drive together there at once after coffee." But before we had left his study for the dining-room the telephone bell rang. Witte listened, became anxious, and after a few monosyllabic questions set down the receiver. Then turning to me he said, "Something grave is happening. Akimoff<sup>1</sup> tells me there will be no sitting of the Council to-day.<sup>2</sup> It appears that some crime is being devised in connection with the sitting. He cannot tell me what it is. My impression from what I have just heard is that the terrorists want to blow up the upper chamber and all its members." I said, "We shall know later. As you have ordered the motor let us use it. Come with me after lunch to the Exhibition of Motor Cars, in the Michael Riding School." Witte assented, and when the repast was over we went. The crime devised was the murder of Witte.

This attempt, however, was postponed to the day of the next sitting of the Council, but in the meantime things took an unexpected turn. Kazantseff went with Feodoroff to a

<sup>1</sup> President of the Council of the Empire.

<sup>2</sup> On the 9th June, 1907.

place outside Petersburg in a wood where on the eve he had hidden the explosives for the bombs. Feodoroff and he first walked along the rails and then turned into the forest. Kazantseff having found the place where he had hidden the materials, began to fill the bombs. Feodoroff at first intended to wait until the work was done, but on second thoughts he took a dagger and at once plunged it into Kazantseff's neck. As it chanced it was a weapon which he had received from his victim a day or two before for a different human sacrifice. Kazantseff quivered, fell to the ground, and lay motionless in a pool of blood. Then the murderer began to rifle his pockets for papers, but the seemingly dead man stirred and gazed up at Feodoroff weirdly. Losing all self-mastery Feodoroff seized the dagger and drove it wildly into Kazantseff's cheeks and neck, having forgotten to take it out of the scabbard, and in his frenzy he at last dealt such a sweeping blow with it that the head was severed from the trunk. Then he went back to Petersburg, gave himself up to the revolutionary party, confessed his crimes, and asked them to put him to death.

As soon as I learned the details I communicated them to London<sup>1</sup> in the hope that European opinion might perhaps constrain the Russian government to accept the offer made by Feodoroff to surrender himself on condition that he had a public trial. This I did in concert with Witte, who said to me, however, "Please write down this prediction of mine before you send your telegram: the Russian government will not bring Feodoroff nor his companion to trial because if it did it is the Tsar's own environment that . . . would be the real accused, and it is they whom the evidence would condemn. Therefore, they cannot accept your challenge." And I wrote his prediction down. It came true. None the less Witte made every effort to have light thrown on the plots against his life, but to no purpose. Stolypin and the Minister of Justice<sup>2</sup> were determined that

<sup>1</sup> They were telegraphed by me to the *Daily Telegraph*.

<sup>2</sup> Shtsheglovitoff, the same minister who arranged the infamous indictment of an innocent Jew for an imaginary ritual murder.

the matter should be hushed up, so they allowed only a few formalities to take place before ending the inquiry. Stolypin himself had requested me, the year before, to use my influence to keep Witte out of Russia, and answering a direct question of mine, added that while willing to protect him if he should come back, he could not promise to do it efficaciously.

This attitude and all that it was subsequently found to imply filled the ex-premier with bitterness of soul. He complained of it to various ministers and dignitaries, and finally brought the matter to the knowledge of the Emperor. But he obtained no satisfaction. The official inquiry into the attempt on his life by means of the infernal machines was stopped by the public prosecutor on the ground that he could not find the guilty parties. The investigation into the other plot likewise became a mere matter of form. I still possess a long document dictated by the statesman himself asking me to bring the following facts to the cognisance of the civilised world:—

"In circles that may fairly be termed official, the various attempts on my life were spoken of, and in one case written about, several days before they were actually made.<sup>1</sup> You know the crimes laid to my charge. I was accused of having made peace with the Japanese and of having destroyed the autocracy in Russia. And the reactionary hangers-on of the court were for killing me. The Prefect of Petersburg<sup>2</sup> himself stated that he was aware that an attempt on my life would be made. The second plot against me was known to many people in advance: several members of the Council of the Empire had heard of it. The President of the Council knew of it and adjourned the sitting on account of it. The ex-Director of the Department of the Police<sup>3</sup> announced it to the ex-Minister of Finances, Shipoff. I received a letter

<sup>1</sup> I can confirm this assertion for I was present on some occasions when Witte was warned. I once warned him myself.

<sup>2</sup> Von Launitz. He was himself assassinated in accordance with a plot arranged by the head spy of the government, Azeff.

<sup>3</sup> A. A. Lopukhine.



from my would-be murderer demanding 5000 roubles, and the express carrier who handed me the letter was authorised to take the money back. I put white paper into the envelope as though it were banknotes, informed the police agent, and asked him to have the express messenger followed. My request was agreed to verbally, but it was not complied with, lest the criminal should be caught.

"What grieved me profoundly was that a lying report was spread at the time by the reactionaries that I had had the bombs put down my own chimney. At present even they do not dare to repeat it because the conspirators who committed the crime have since become known. But how members of the Stolypin cabinet could have given currency to this black calumny, aware as they were that the Prefect of Petersburg was cognisant of the conspiracy long before it was carried out, I cannot understand.

"Why was Kazantseff not arrested after any of his murders? As you know, he took part in the assassination of Herzenstein. Of this a gendarme was eye-witness. He also arranged the plot against my life. He had your friend Yollos shot in Moscow. Then he came back to Petersburg to try again to have me killed. The authorities are conversant with the intention and the endeavours to compass it. They were also informed of the day, and yet they plead that they could do nothing to bring the plot-weaver to justice! And when Kazantseff himself was killed they feigned not to know who he was. Mark these dates: on the 27th May (9th June) the murder of Kazantseff became known, yet on the 15th/28th July the public prosecutor abandoned the inquiry into the plots against my life. But the authorities knew all about Kazantseff. They must have known, because it was in concert with the League of the Russian People that he had Yollos shot. And when he did this he was a detective agent; he was in receipt of a salary from a government official, and he was living on a false passport given to him by the secret police. In order to be able to entrap impulsive young men he had been authorised to give

himself out as a revolutionist, and in this capacity he enlisted some unthinking lads to execute what he assured them were decrees of the terrorist organisation.

"The plot to kill me was ingenious. Kazantseff betrayed a man named Petroff and had him sent to Archangel. This Petroff had been a member of the council of working men's deputies who, when I was premier, wanted to arrest me, but all of whom I had arrested. If Kazantseff's plan had put me out of existence, how would it have been explained? Not as a reactionary, but as a revolutionary crime. The authorities and their press would have pretended that Petroff had escaped from his place of punishment in order to be avenged on me. There would have been a tremendous outcry against 'those mad revolutionists who would not spare even Count Witte.' Remember, all this took place at the moment when you were telling me and an unbelieving world that the second Duma was about to be dissolved. You remember how your statement was denied first by Nelidoff, then by the Finance Minister, Kokofftseff, and at last by the prime minister himself, in spite of which you repeated after each denial the time limit before which the Duma would cease to exist. Your prediction was verified. An adequate pretext was needed for the coercive measures then planned. A new electoral law, whittling down the franchise, was being secretly drafted by Stolypin, but there was no specious excuse for it. The murder of Witte by 'terrorists' would have supplied one. And how much more stringent that bill would have been if the murder of Witte had taken place in time and could have been laid to the charge of those who were desirous of enlarging the functions of the Duma!"

The chain of thought between what Witte expressed in this utterance and what he inferred but left unsaid is sufficiently visible. He often told me that he was convinced of the complicity of prominent personages in the plot to kill him. When the official inquiry was at last abandoned he read me a letter for Stolypin, the Premier, which he had drafted, and after we had discussed its wording he had it delivered.

He finally contrived to elicit the Tsar's opinion on the matter. Of that I possess an exact copy.<sup>1</sup>

It was an emphatic assertion that ample justice had been done to Witte, and that the Minister of Justice was right in quashing the investigation.

In sooth that was the nearest approach to justice to which the Tsarist State was capable of rising from the depths to which it then had fallen. It was the perverted social and moral conceptions embodied in those revolting methods of Azeff, Kazantseff, and their exalted employers that quickened in men, even in ardent monarchists, a puissant desire to have the country rescued at every cost from the choking grip of this awful nightmare.

The regime having sophisticated the intelligence and debased the soul of the people had come to be thus destructive of the foundation of mutual trust. It encouraged private citizens to form associations for the murder of eminent men of liberal tendencies. And several of these were now in existence. Whatever stock of moral force Tsarism may have had at the outset would seem to have been exhausted at the close of the Manchurian campaign. And the differences in the capacities of the various races and social classes of the community for steady advance along the road of cultured thought and feeling were by that time become too great, too fundamental, to warrant hope from any organising policy with unity as one of its aims. The Tsarist State was obviously condemned to die. With a genial statesman like Witte at its head it might still, so to say, have appealed from the sentence, but only with the empty hope of prolonging life while the appeal was being argued. With Witte immobilised it could only drift helplessly towards the abyss.

<sup>1</sup> I am unable to say whether this judgment of the Emperor was scribbled on Witte's remonstrance to Stolypin or on the report submitted to him by the Minister of Justice. A complete account of all the details is among my papers which for the moment are beyond my reach. But the main point is the tenor of the Tsar's judgment, and that I have reproduced.

## CHAPTER XII

### RASPUTIN—A SYMBOL

To the ignorant and almost illiterate peasant Rasputin is attributed a rôle akin to that of Samson in pulling down the pillars of the Russian Tsardom. His sinister influence on the conduct of the war, his co-operation, deliberate and unwitting, with the foreign enemies of Russia, the wrath which his outrageous conduct aroused against the autocrat and the autocracy, are set down by contemporary annalists among the principal causes of the Russian Revolution.

But the evidence adduced in support of this view is wholly inadequate. If the slovenly *mooshik* from Siberia had never existed, other charlatans would have wielded the sorcerer's wand in his stead. Before he appeared there had been no lack of them. "If only I have honey," says the Turkish proverb, "the flies will come from Baghdad." To the honey in Tsarskoye Selo they came from France and Montenegro, but competition was open to all the peoples of the world.

It is my belief that although friends of his—men like Stürmer, Protopopoff, and the Metropolitan Archbishop Pitirim—were influential, Rasputin their friend was only a symbol.

In a little Siberian village named Pokrovskoye, among the fens of Tiumen (province of Tobolsk), where the haunts of human beings are few and far apart, Gregory Rasputin first saw the light of day. The inhabitants, mostly sons and daughters of convicts, with developed atavistic tendencies, enjoyed an evil reputation among the neighbouring hamlets and villages, and prominent among them Gregory's father, known by the Christian name of Efim, eked out a precarious livelihood by horse-stealing. Brought up in this tainted atmosphere, the boy Gregory or Grisha

readily fell in with his surroundings, and from the time when he began to strike out his own walk in life—that of a carter—was known as “Rasputin,” an appellation which comes from the word *rasputnik*—debauchee. It is alleged by his enemies that from the first he was a lost soul, utterly cynical, vicious, and callous, but this is probably an exaggeration. People found something to like or admire in him even then. He made at least two friends in his childhood, the one a gardener named Barnabas or Varnava, and the other an ordinary peasant Striaptcheff—both hooligans—and he retained and reciprocated their friendship to the end of his life. With the former, who subsequently became a monk, I was personally acquainted before Rasputin had him raised to the dignity of Bishop of Tobolsk, from which height he was afterwards gently lowered with the empty title of “Ex-Archbishop.”

It is curious to note how the cardinal doctrine of Rasputin's later theology embraces and summarises his own proclivities and practices. It runs thus: “Sin in order that you may repent and obtain forgiveness.” For he appears to have sinned freely in his unregenerate days and with a zest which he was wont to avow when answering those who rebuked him, “A libertine (Rasputin) I am and a libertine (Rasputin) I will remain!” It is in accordance with the fitness of things that some of the most helpful documentary materials for the early life of this extraordinary man should be laid away in the archives of the criminal court of Tobolsk. Gossip which would fain pass for history, and for aught we know is history without its hall-mark, but with some of its credentials, lays horse-stealing, perjury, and the rape of an old woman and of a very young girl to his charge. For the second of these offences he was sentenced to be flogged. On neither of the other charges was he actually convicted, but they were not formally quashed until after his tragic death. If drunkenness were a criminal offence in those remote regions, Rasputin would have been a hardened criminal, for that and unclean living were his besetting sins. The utmost he could accomplish by the most strenuous

religious effort, after his conversion, was not to eradicate, but only to restrict and re-label them.

But inebriety and debauch were not his only vices in those early days. The most quarrelsome among the villagers, he was the principal figure in well-nigh every vulgar brawl. Sometimes he would drive his cart to the town of Tiumen for hay, and return home a few days later drunk and disfigured, without the hay, without the money, and occasionally without the horses. And this disordered life he continued to lead until some fourteen years ago, when he attained the age of thirty and the state of grace. In Russia, where spontaneous repentance is generally the ultimate phase of crime, and religious conversion the last evolutionary stage of the sinner, touching charity on the part of the Russian people can be confidently reckoned upon by the evil-doer expiating his offences. Rasputin was no exception to the rule, but his spiritual regeneration began at a relatively early period, while he was still capable of sinning, having been occasioned by one external influence and gradually modified by another.

His journey to Damascus, as he is said to have termed it, consisted of a drive to Verkhoturie, a town some twenty miles distant from his native village. He was conveying thither a priest named Zaboroffsky, who is now the Rector of the Theological Academy of Tomsk, a pious theologian and zealous churchman, who entered into conversation with him about the brevity of life, the necessity of preparing for death, the hideousness of sin, and the means of achieving salvation. He exhorted Rasputin, whose evil fame had reached even him, to do penance and lead "the god-like life" as they term it in Russia.

Like most peasants in the Tsardom, Rasputin evinced a keen interest in these and kindred subjects, put various questions to his fare, and by the time he reached his destination felt moved to his innermost depths. "When I took leave of Father Zaboroffsky," he told a friend long afterwards, "I fell into a profound meditation, and at its close my mind was made up: I resolved to do penance for my

sins, to lead a godly life ever after, and to help those who like myself were plunged in ignorance and iniquity.” He naturally had the traditional vision. A saint (Simon) appeared to him and commanded him to give up his vicious habits, and as is usual in such cases, the contrite sinner resolved firmly to repent and turn from his evil ways. This temporary detachment from all but the cares of death and salvation meant to Rasputin immunity from the prison house or the convict settlement. Thereupon the gates of many a monastery were open to him had he chosen to become a monk, but whether from a sense of his own unworthiness, or because he was still too illiterate, or in obedience to a common Russian impulse to wander, he chose the painful but varied existence of a pilgrim, tramping from village to village, from shrine to shrine, without scrip or purse, barefoot and bare-headed, living on alms and collecting offerings for churches. Among other places he visited Jerusalem.

Although he felt no vocation for the monastic life, Rasputin visited several monasteries and displayed an eager curiosity to become acquainted with the scriptures and the fathers of the Church. During a protracted stay in one of these retreats<sup>1</sup> he learned to read, and applying this accomplishment to the study of the Bible, of Church history, and of a few of the writings of the fathers, he acquired a smattering of what his enthusiastic followers ranked as “theology.” During the two years which passed in this preparation for his mission, he was assisted by the monks, with whom he was accustomed, after the manner of Russians who brood, to discuss religious and metaphysical problems with keenness, interest, and the conceptions of a child. With all this he never learned to write grammatically, orthographically, or even legibly. But he did not long abide in those tents of Kedar which afforded too little scope for a schemer who may have felt semi-consciously that his oyster was the vast Empire of all the Russias. Within a few years of his departure from this peaceful Abalaksky Monastery, he had soared aloft and was circling above the Tsardom.

<sup>1</sup> In the Abalaksky Monastery.

It is easy to smile incredulously at the religious conversion of a low-minded being like Rasputin, who breathed an atmosphere of vice and bewrayed an inherited tendency to crime. Reading it in the light of his subsequent conduct, one feels tempted to label this apparent change for the better as an act of downright hypocrisy. But such simplicism in appreciating mixed motives argues unacquaintance with the intricacy and subtlety of the moral world in general, and of Russian psychology in particular. Nowhere are good, bad, and indifferent motives so inextricably interwoven as in the Russian conscience, nowhere are the conflicting issues of action harder to size up. The elements of personality which only in rare critical moments are called into play, to bring forth the deciding act that shall set its stamp on the moral individuality, are precisely those which the surface agitations of every-day existence leave wholly untouched. Hence they are unknown to the outsider, the friend, the confidant, nay, to the man himself, until the circumstances arise that bring them into action. The Russian character is a many-chorded instrument and the every-day notes, touched by the ordinary events of a life-time, give no impression of those other passionate sounds which a sudden and subtle appeal is capable of evoking. A certain heroic force for good or evil is often dormant for years in an individual which only the stress of storm can awaken. In any case, it would be rash to refuse to Rasputin credit for all the earnestness and sincerity of which his shallow nature was capable. I have known many peasants like him in various parts of the vast Russian Empire who, so far as I could judge by observation, lacked only the opportunity to rival his feats, but who, for want of temptation, never swerved very widely from the line of conduct which they had adopted at their conversion. Rasputin himself was at no time callous. Even in the days of his alleged omnipotence he could never dispense with friendship nor turn a deaf ear to the cries of the suffering. He was ever ready to hie to the assistance of the poor and the friendless. When he sat comfortably in his reception room at the house of the Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod,



receiving the high and the lowly, he displayed open-hearted interest in the woes of the latter and readily contributed to assuage their misery and better their lot. His deepest instincts were those of his people, and hardness of heart is assuredly not among their failings. This view is confirmed by the testimony of adversaries like the Bishop of Saratoff, Hermogen.

Morbid retrospection is almost an inherent quality of many Russians and asceticism its ordinary outcome. Debarred for ages from all forms of activity fitted to satisfy the mind, the Russian broods over the mental and material conditions of his existence and analyses his relations to that unseen world into which his religion gives him a glimpse. These meditations frequently touch the more timorous souls with a species of madness, distorting their piety into superstitious terror and criminal practices. But despite these spiritual visions, the earthiness of the individual is still there, merely dormant.

Rasputin then was no mere hypocrite. For a time at least he subjected himself to the discipline which he advocated, and endeavoured in his primitive way to provide individual life with a spiritual or emotional basis. On his journeys to Odessa, Kieff, Moscow, and Petrograd, and after his return home, he distinguished himself by a degree of austerity in observing the practices of his faith which astonished his neighbours and set many of them thinking about the meaning of life and their relations to the Unseen. He was always the first to enter the church, the last to leave it, and the most contrite in bewailing his transgressions. He would expose his half-naked body to the wintry winds, walk barefoot in the snow, and fast for days. When kneeling before the altar he would strike the ground with his forehead in the usual Orthodox way, but with such unusual violence that the blood trickled down his face.

These and other austerities, coupled with the consideration in which he was held by some of the villagers, filled him with spiritual pride. His head was gradually turned. His knowledge of "theology" and his works of penitence seemed

to raise him to dizzy heights of perfection. To those who questioned him about his conversion he gave an account which set it on a par with that of St. Paul, and hinted in obscure phrases that the divine light then vouchsafed him was shining still within, enabling him to discern things hidden, present and future. His pilgrimage and self-imposed penances having obtained for him the appellation of *Starets* or elder—a name accorded not to monks or priests, but to laymen who have renounced the world and live only for God and the salvation of their own souls—he sought to add to it the titles of wonder-worker and prophet. Whenever his neighbours put a question to him he would look dreamily away into the distance, remain silent for several minutes, and then reply slowly and in disconnected phrases as though awakening from a trance. The penitent thief was occasionally merged in the crafty charlatan.

Like so many other notorieties who play a flashy part on the world's theatre, Rasputin strove to live up to his strange reputation without doing too great violence to his ingrained leanings. And he attracted several admiring as well as believing followers, even in his own native village. For in addition to remarkable hypnotic power he possessed an inexhaustible fund of low cunning, was wonderfully quick in perceiving the weaknesses of his fellows, and supple in adjusting his action to them. He felt that a considerable element of mysticism lies dormant in the soul of nearly every Russian which a death, a disappointment, a bout of illness, or an earnest word of exhortation may at any moment awaken to activity, with far-reaching consequences. This religious temperament explains the number, variety, and strange character of the sects in the Tsardom.<sup>1</sup> Thus there is a sect of wanderers whose members may never tarry more than three days in any one place, nor carry any baggage with them in their life-long peregrinations; a sect of religious Nihilists; a numerous sect composed of fanatics who mutilate themselves (*Skopty*) most cruelly, earn their livelihood very

<sup>1</sup> For years I made a study of them, intending to write a history of Russian sects.

often as money-changers, help each other generously, and leave their wealth to worthy public charities; a widely spread sect of men and women (Khlysty) who pray together, join hands and dance together, and then extinguish the lights and give themselves up to wild orgies. . . . There were suicidal sects of which the earliest had many adepts in the north and centre of Russia, and whose cardinal dogma was salvation by means of the "baptism of fire and water." Hundreds of members of this fanatical sodality cheerfully burned themselves alive, chanting pious hymns or shouting allelujah as they died. Most Russian sects<sup>1</sup> were founded by ignorant men or women who felt disgusted with the emptiness or the evils of life, heard the call of divine grace, and formed the resolution to live for God, but who together with these moral and religious strands invariably twisted some of their own weaknesses or vices and produced a curious cord which linked them to the earth or to the nether regions sometimes more closely and more firmly than to heaven.

Rasputin's propensities lay in the direction of the Khlysty, but that he was ever formally initiated into that community, as some of his enemies maintain, there is no evidence to show. Nor is it of moment to decide whether he received the impulse from without. Religious history and psychology teach us that mysticism and sensuality are never very far apart. As concupiscence was the main source of his own fall from grace, he not unnaturally generalised and taught that that was the one deadly sin against which the true Christian's exertions should be unceasingly directed. But the Khlysty's method he propounded harmonised with his vicious proclivities and reminds me of the answer once made by a bright Sunday-school child who, when catechised by the Roman Catholic priest as to what one must do in order to benefit by the sacrament of penance, made answer, "You must first go and commit sin, your reverence." That was exactly the doctrine propagated by Rasputin, who maintained that salvation can be achieved only by repentance, and

<sup>1</sup> In Russia there are sects that have come down from the earliest ages of Christianity, and that of the Skoptsy is probably one.

that in order to repent efficaciously it behoves one first to sin. Like the Khlysty, whose sect his own little congregations resembled, he taught that every act of contrition in common must be preceded by the commission of sin in common.

Incontinence being the predominant vice against which a Christian must struggle, the means of combating it were thus unfolded by Rasputin as they had been taught by the Khlysty. They commended themselves to the sensual mind of the teacher who, in these tenets, perceived an easy way of associating his inveterate vice with godliness, while the simple souls who gathered around him as their saviour were amazed at the ease and pleasure with which they could qualify for the Kingdom of Heaven.

But the hard-headed male peasants of Pokrovskoye received the stories of Rasputin's marvellous gifts of prophecy, healing, and second sight with the scepticism which is part of their upbringing; whereas the hearts of the women were touched, their faith was assured, their zeal was inflamed. They bruited abroad the tidings of the new prophet, whose reputation soon spread to the neighbouring villages and towns. From time to time the curious and the pious came to converse with him and returned impressed, some with his eccentricity, others with his sanctity, all with his personality.

It would be rash to assert that, at this transitional period of his career, Rasputin's attempts to form a sect were inspired by motives wholly foreign to what went by the name of religion. True he was a man of excitable temperament, strong passions, possessed by one ungovernable vice, and devoid of a moral standard. But he was profoundly dissatisfied with his former way of living, and without perhaps analysing too closely the specific causes of his dissatisfaction he was sincerely desirous of entering into continuous relations with the Unseen. He had knowledge of some religious denominations in which depravity, in particular that form of it to which he himself had so long been a slave, was ingeniously grafted on piety and the strange mixture provided with a sanction termed divine. Thus he had met with sectarians who, persuaded that to the pure in spirit all things

are clean and may be made holy, had adopted and hallowed practices which are penalised by the criminal law. And to a mind steeped, as his had been, in moral uncleanness, and twisted by fanatical delusions, it may well have seemed conceivable that antinomianism in sexual morality is compatible with and even conducive to true religion. He assured me that that was his conviction and his accents were sincere. I have met with other fanatics in Russia who held, preached, and practised these tenets and appeared not only never to feel a qualm of remorse or a twinge of misgiving, but to enjoy a calm of conscience which the truly religious often lack. And they were ready to undergo the severest pains and penalties rather than abandon the faith or swerve from the conduct which they ascribed to divine revelation. It is not easy for Westerns who have not lived among such people and become thoroughly conversant with their perverted modes of thought to weigh their motives and impulses and determine the parts played by semi-conscious self-deception, by fanatical delusions, and by hypnotic suggestion. I feel strongly that beneath the coarseness and selfishness of such a man's outer life and his vulgar histrionic demeanour one may fairly admit the possibilities of mystic stirrings and spiritual aspirations.

The seeds sown by Rasputin fell on grateful soil, the Russian psyche being prone to mysticism, and he soon attained the status of local saint. Peasant women journeyed to Pokrovskoye, bringing with them the halt, the blind, the sick, and, above all, those who were "possessed by demons"—a class still deemed numerous in the Russia of to-day. Rasputin treated some, with results which were thought to be miraculous, and declared that others were being tried by God and must bear their cross or respond cheerfully to the summons calling them to another life. His power over the spirits of evil was thus recognised, at first by women, and these enabled him to found a congregation of "Sisters"—the nucleus of a sect. Now and again he would leave this flock, retire into the forest for several days to commune with the deity, with whom his relations were becoming more

direct and intimate, and then return with a brighter halo to the little community. Possessing by this time a house of his own, he had an apartment turned into a small chapel where religious exercises were carried on. He also dug a deep cellar on the ground floor into which he daily went down, remaining there for hours in prayer and meditation, wrestling, as he said, with the devil, whom he vanquished at last by dint of superhuman efforts and after many vicissitudes. In this "dug-out" he was also wont to sleep.

For a considerable period the new sect, which never openly broke with the Orthodox Church, consisted almost exclusively of women, most of whom were young, blooming, and comely. Among the earliest and simplest were Katya, Dunya, Helen. More interesting than these was Alexandra Dubrovina, the daughter of well-to-do parents, a healthy pretty girl, brimful of spirits, whose relations with the Teacher form a chapter apart. It was only very gradually and partially that the scepticism of some of the men was overcome by the frequency of Rasputin's marvellous cures and the repetition of heavenly signs and tokens. One of the first male converts was his god-son, another was his cousin Raspopoff, and these men by their example dispelled the misgivings of the doubters and drew others to the new sect. For their lives were exemplary. They had forsworn alcoholic drinks, were eminently peaceful and law-abiding, kept regular hours, and were honest and industrious. "By our fruits you may know us," Rasputin said triumphantly to those of little faith who were still unconvinced.

It is characteristic of his hypnotic power over women that the "sisters" displayed towards him the fervour of religious devotion, intensified by the ardour of a love which tyranny, physical cruelty of the most revolting character, and frequent causes for jealousy were powerless to damp. One instance of this was afforded by his relations with Alexandra Dubrovina, whose parents were in easy circumstances and whose outlook upon life was of the brightest. This promising girl abandoned her home and kindred to seek eternal salvation or transient happiness in the house and under the spiritual

guidance of the "saint," to whom western peoples would give a different name. The girl became passionately attached to her teacher although he had taken a wife five years before his conversion with whom he was still living and was the father of three healthy children. Setting out on a pilgrimage to the shrines of Kieff, Rasputin took Alexandra with him, bullied her, terrorised her, tortured her, inflicted grievous bodily harm on her, and brought her back a mere shadow of her former self. Her mother exercising her parental authority insisted on her returning home and refused to allow her to resume relations with the brutal ruffian who was posing as the spokesman of God. But the girl was not to be held back. She insisted on the invincible necessity of ending her life with Rasputin, for whom her affection was unbounded. She could not and would not live without him, and declared that neither filial piety nor bolts and bars would prevent her from carrying out her decision. Accordingly she returned to the prophet and soon afterwards breathed her last, whereupon her younger sister, Irene, rushed off to take her place, was admitted as a sister, was martyred in turn by the sectarian, pined away, and died in a few months.<sup>1</sup>

In this way Rasputin took advantage of the generous, trusting impulse of the untutored young women of the village and the province, and impressed the coarse veinings of his degenerate nature on their plastic souls. The seed of corruption took root and he spanned the community of which he was the centre with an arc of light emanating from the phosphorescence of moral rottenness. He now began to deliver his "divine message" in clearer terms than before. "In me," he told his hearers, "is incarnate a particle of the Supreme Being. I am an incarnation of God, and only through me can you hope to be saved. And the manner of your salvation is this: You must be united with me in soul and also in body. The virtue that goes out from me is the source of light, the destruction of sin." Those who assimilated this doctrine—and it was accepted by his entire flock—had no difficulty in believing that to a mortal endowed

<sup>1</sup> In the year 1908.

with these privileges all things were permitted. Communion, nay union, with him was regarded as the one road leading to eternal happiness; and they took it cheerfully.

The liturgic ceremonies, if one may dignify with such a name the enormities of Rasputin's sodality, were almost identical with those of the Khlysty. "Sacrificial prayer" was the designation given to it by the pontiff. As soon as the first star became visible in the sky Rasputin, together with the brethren and the sisters, went down to the underground room and piled up wood on the hearth. On a tripod in the centre of the fire was placed a vessel filled with incense and aromatic herbs. Each brother then took his place between two sisters and holding hands they all formed a circle and moved slowly round the fire, chanting as they went the sacramental formula: "Our sin is for the sake of repentance. Sin for repentance sake, O Lord!" After a time as the fire burned less bright the dance became quicker. Sighs, moans, ejaculations were continuous and the pace grew ever brisker. At last the logs would flicker and the fire would die. From out of the darkness Rasputin's melodious voice would then be uplifted: "Brethren, tempt your flesh." Whereupon one and all would throw themselves on the floor and the revolting orgy began.

It was a repetition of the procedure of the Khlysty and a fresh illustration of the recognised fact that mysticism and sensuality are so close akin that one feels tempted to call them correlates.

When judging Rasputin and his followers for these iniquities, which were not only repeated at regular intervals but were idealised and hallowed as the essence of the law of God, it behoves us to remember that a numerous sect exists and has long existed in various parts of Russia with the same tenets and practices, while certain other denominations are more abnormal still. Nor should it be forgotten that Rasputin was but a Siberian boor who had acquired a slight tincture of information and misinformation respecting the Church and its doctrines, and was imitating others better educated than himself who had sought to consecrate



their false sentiments or predominant vices by raising them to the level of divine behests and declaring them to be conditions of eternal salvation. Rasputin discreetly preached his doctrine in Kazan, Saratoff, Samara, and Kieff, and made numerous converts there, some of whom I met at different times.

His fellow-townsmen of Pokrovskoye, aware of the nature of "sacrificial prayer," were, with few exceptions, indignant. They had seen some of their most promising womenfolk drawn into the seducer's net and their lives complicated and in several cases wrecked, and fearing that other victims might follow they cast around for means to rid the village of the blasphemous debauchee. A formal protest was drawn up and presented to the authorities, in which the petitioners set forth that their daughters were being corrupted by Rasputin, and that new-born children were being abandoned outside huts and houses. But nothing appears to have been done by the authorities.

Meanwhile the rising light, whose fame was fast spreading, had, on his journeys, made the acquaintance of a theologian of the Orthodox Church and impressed him most favourably. In Moscow he was presented to various ladies of wealth, position, title, and influence, who marvelled at his shrewd remarks, pithy sayings, apposite similes, and intuitive insight into character and motives, and also at his religious discipline. His appearance in a salon was undoubtedly striking. He would enter the room with the air of one who had usurped an empire and was striving after the prestige requisite to an emperor, attired in peasant's costume, and with that scrupulous lack of cleanliness without which his garb might be deemed affected. His presence overpowered the "lower natures" with which he came in contact. Their will sometimes became numbed forthwith. His soft soulful eyes catching theirs poured forth a magnetic flood which induced passivity and soul-surrender. Even educated men of the world like Prince Yussupoff felt its power. His non-conformity to such social conventions as soap, water, and brushes impressed many of the weaker vessels and intensified

their admiration. The Minister of the Interior, A. N. Khvostoff, said: "He is an extraordinary hypnotiser. . . . So powerful is his influence that the most matter-of-fact police agents surrender to it in a couple of days. Although these fellows have, so to say, passed through fire and water we have to change them every few days because they fall under his power. . . . Further, as I have said already, he can stop a flow of blood by his spell."<sup>1</sup>

Mgr. Hermogen, Bishop of Saratoff, who was dismissed and sent to a monastery through Rasputin, was one of the two men who had helped to thrust him into the lime-light of the imperial palace. The bishop recently said:<sup>2</sup> "We, the representatives of the highest clergy, are more than all others to blame for having helped him on. . . . It was we who pushed him forward. . . . But to my thinking at the outset the divine fire glowed in Rasputin's soul. He was imbued with a certain internal sensibility, and I confess freely that I experienced his influence on myself. He more than once responded to my heart-sorrows, and in this way he conquered me, and in the beginning of his career conquered others."

One might write a volume about the man who for some years stood behind the throne of the Tsar and, in a very limited sense, influenced the destiny of all the Russias, without satisfactorily explaining to Westerns his strange career or fully accounting for his power over people. For all the known facts are inadequate to justify either. Nothing that Rasputin said will enable one to get at the sources of this power, and most of the things which he is alleged to have done seem calculated to seal them up. The well from which it took its rise was latent, and the words that come nearest to expressing it are personal magnetism. Rasputin's eyes were fascinating. His tone was often soft and insinuating, and his gait was that of one who is conscious of being the agent of a preternatural power and needs make no apology

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Byloie*, No. 1 (23), 1917, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. "Bishop Hermogen and Rasputin," *Russkoye Slovo*, No. 294, p. 3, 1917.

for his existence or his acts. Self-sufficiency and superiority might be read in his every gesture, and yet a careful observer would have noted that many of his movements were not natural. They were vitiated by a touch of the vulgar familiarity of the bailiff or the blackmailer. To the every-day type of pithless mankind he communicated his own faith, and over many society women avid of change and prone to mysticism his sway was unbounded as that of the Pied Piper over the children of Hamelin. His habit of mind during this first phase of his career was a constant implicit reference to those elusive standards of mysticism which so many Russians accept without questioning.

Rasputin took nothing for granted, not even the precepts of Christianity. Facts were as mere potter's clay in his hands, and he kneaded them to suit ideals which to many became idols. The law and the prophets were construed by him as by Mohammed, to suit his predominant passion and his changing moods, and like the devil he could quote scripture for his purposes. For he was a law unto himself and a prophet to the weak willed and the degenerates among whom he lived and worked. "To the clean," I once heard him say, "all things are clean," and misgivings, prejudices, and convictions were dissipated by his utterances; yet the practice which was under discussion at the time is still brand-marked as immoral by the *élite* of human kind. But Rasputin had only to put the more exacting of his hearers under the charm of his personality to draw some of them down to the level of his purpose. The evil proclivities of the others he supplied with divine sanction, transforming moral perversion into a virtue. Reasoned discipline was loosened at his words.

One may fitly leave to Rasputin's biographer the task of following his career through the many dreary sloughs through which he and his followers—now the unsophisticated peasants, and later the great ladies of and about the imperial court—went floundering. His acquaintance with Bishop Theophan, with the priest John of Cronstadt whose "communion" service on our journey to the Crimea I have already sketched, and more particularly with the fiery monk

Iliodor and with Bishop Hermogen stood him in good stead. At court he soon filled the gap left by the French spiritist Philippe, for whose sake the Tsar had exposed himself to a rebuff from President Felix Faure. The mere touch of Rasputin's warm rough hand gently stroking the throbbing brow dulled the sharp pain and soothed the feverish brain of the Empress and of others. And numerous witnesses who have never been his partisans attest that he could charm away with his incantations the bleeding from the nose to which the heir apparent was subject. If suffering be the direct effect of sin, was it not permissible to give to its most efficacious cure the name of godliness? Rasputin's hypnotic power which he thus employed to ease the Empress' megrims and her child's frequent maladies, his prophetic sense which enabled him to forecast the future in so far as it concerned the imperial family, and the indissoluble way in which the destinies of himself, the dynasty, and the Tsardom were bound together in his sibylline utterances sank so deeply into the morbidly impressible psyche of the Tsaritsa that she desired nothing better than to become an organ of his will, and to have those affairs of the Empire in which she was personally interested conducted by the light of his intelligence. I once heard him say: "It is none of my doing that my destiny is interwoven inextricably with that of the imperial family. I am only the exponent, not the weaver of Fate. And what I have said, I know." In his life, characterised by numerous coincidences, the coming to pass of this prediction was the most striking of all.

In Rasputin, hot, impulsive nature though he was, the self-assertion of passion was now presumably mastered for a while by cool reason and patient discipline, which kept him watching and waiting for the expected coherence of time with place and opportunity. And when the synthesis was complete he utilised it for a purpose inconceivably puerile. But that purpose once achieved his self-discipline relaxed. Here, as elsewhere, familiarity bred contempt, and with the growth of his influence his precautions ceased, his predominant passions reasserted their sways, and the

inspired prophet became once more a drunken, prating debauchee, who befouled with his filthy tongue the names not only of the persons whose honour he had robbed, but also of the few who kept clear of dishonour. On his entry into the world of greatness through the wicket of the Winter Palace, Rasputin struck his mysticism several notes above the pitch to which the august inmates of the palace were accustomed. He spurned the tables and planchettes which had rapped or written under the prehensile fingers of Philippe or of the two grand duchesses who were in daily converse with the spirits of the great Beyond. Rasputin had an invisible familiar, one of his own, and he made no secret of his conviction that this Mentor dwelt high above the principalities and thrones. For to some followers the Siberian peasant announced plainly that he was the envoy—and hinted that he was also an incarnation—of the Supreme Being, wherefore he needed no histrionic paraphernalia to put himself in contact with his Inspirer.

Rasputin's force—the operations and effects of which faintly outlined themselves in the annals of the dynasty—lay not so much in himself as in the weaknesses of those who made him what he became. It is but fair to admit, however, that he was materially aided by circumstances which to the superstitious were evidences of his preternatural mission. After the Empress's repeated hopes and disappointments, he is said to have foretold with positive certitude the birth of a son.<sup>1</sup> He subsequently impressed upon the lady the conviction that his presence was an indispensable condition to the well-being of her little Alexis, and indeed to that of the imperial family generally. And various episodes in their lives appeared to bear out the belief. Among the coincidences which invest the prophet's life with the element of the fantastic were the occurrence of mishaps whenever he was sent away from the court, and the successful application of remedial measures followed by the brightening of the prospect as soon as he returned. Thus it was while

<sup>1</sup> I had this from one of Rasputin's intimates and several of his followers, not from himself.

he was away that the heir-apparent fell ill, and in the unanimous judgment of the physicians who attended him recovery, which was very difficult at best, would be impossible unless the boy were taken abroad. That meant for the Tsaritsa separation either from her husband or from her son, both of whom she loved with all the fervour of her strange nature. Rasputin on his return, when he learned the lady's distress, wrote to the effect that "she must fear nothing, take no heed of what the doctors told her, because above all doctors is their Maker, and He announces through Rasputin's unworthy lips that Alexis will be restored to health without journeys or separations. She is to follow his directions and it will be done with her according to his word." And this promise, like so many others far more improbable, was redeemed. I saw the boy before and after his illness, and from time to time I learned something of the methods recommended by Rasputin and followed by the sovereigns. These and similar "signs and tokens" impressed all who witnessed them.

He treated numbers of people for various diseases, and according to their own account helped many in marvellous ways. The efficacy of his incantations was believed in by all who saw him employ them. Even Prince Yussupoff, in whose palace he was killed, admits that Rasputin, whom he began by disliking, conquered his aversion and eased his asthma. The Minister Khvostoff, who is accused of having bribed two men to kill him, recognised the power of his spells. Stolypin, too, is said to have been hypnotically healed by the mystic after the shock he underwent when his house was blown up. That weak-nerved women should yield to his power is hardly to be wondered at.

I was personally acquainted with Rasputin, as I was acquainted with nearly everybody in Russia who, in my judgment, was likely to exert perceptible influence, open or covert, on the course of public affairs. I could not ignore the man who had the ear of the Tsar and Tsaritsa, who was humoured by courtiers and ministers, and seemingly respected even by Stolypin himself. He told me some

things about himself and many more—that were newer and to me more interesting—about his religious tenets. I wrote them down at the time and had them subsequently confirmed.

Rasputin's career in the Russian capital may be divided into two periods, of which the longer one came largely under my personal cognisance, while the other is known to me only from the narratives of others, and therefore imperfectly and with gaps. The first ends in April, 1914, when I quitted Russia together with Count Witte. The second comprehends everything that took place between that date and the day of Rasputin's death. During both periods the peasant-prophet was accused of many backslidings and some crimes, and as the eminent leader of the Octobrist party, Gutchkoff, acquired extraordinary popularity by a tremendous onslaught in the Duma against him and against the court that protected him, these accusations were everywhere received as proven. It is well to remember, however, that in political crises the haste with which damning charges are gathered and hurled against the biggest targets that offer themselves explains the lack of substance which so often renders them useless as historical materials. Nor do they, as a rule, inflict very dangerous wounds in Russia, where the line between crime and misfortune is shadowy. As far as my knowledge went, during the first period of his court career, Rasputin sedulously eschewed giving advice about any matters except ecclesiastical, but in dealing with these he generally had his way. Bishops were consecrated or transferred at his suggestion, and he at last went so far as to have first M. Izvolsky's brother and then M. Samarin removed from the ministerial post of Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synod on grounds which I am unable to approve.

Gutchkoff's historic attack on the man and, through him, on the dynasty gave currency to ideas which seemed most useful to the reform parties of the Duma at the moment, but are of no avail to the historian. To launch the thunderbolt of moral reprobation against a clever historian like

Rasputin was incongruous from any point of view but the political, and even in this domain it was not free from danger, as the sequel has shown. Even the court, which was most directly aimed at, could contemplate it from none other. For the disquieting side of this pseudo-spiritual movement was that it consisted of ideas, emotions, cravings, and practices which were widespread throughout the Tsardom, and many of which lay at the roots of all popular religion there. One could not well condemn the Tsar, therefore, without at the same time anathematising tens of thousands of the intelligentsia and scores of millions of the peoples who acknowledged his rule.

Gutchkoff's thesis was that Rasputin swayed the Tsaritsa, who ruled the Autocrat of all the Russias, and was therefore an ignoble deceiver and a dangerous adviser. He put it to the Duma that the nation was in peril. I made exhaustive inquiries into the truth of these allegations at the time, for I then had ways and means of investigating them. But I could find no evidence that the Siberian peasant had—with a single exception—ever interfered in any way at any time in matters other than ecclesiastical. And continuing my research down to April, 1914, I was forced to the conclusion that Rasputin had only once made his influence felt in the political domain. Only once. And then, I am bound to say, it was superlatively beneficent. As I heard his own evidence on the subject as well as that of cabinet ministers and court dignitaries, I have good grounds for stating that it was Rasputin who moved the Tsar to turn a deaf ear to the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevitch, who advocated a bellicose policy, and persuaded him to steer clear of the war for which he had been feverishly making ready.<sup>1</sup> Into the charlatan's motives for this advice I am unable to enter.

This evidence of mine offers no extenuation of Rasputin's iniquities nor of the folly of those who connived at them. It is neither more nor less than the statement of a fact.

<sup>1</sup> The details of this story are interesting.



the principal lecture rooms, was not likely to be invaded by the authorities. We there listened to wordy debates about the duty of patriots to forego their individual life-schemes, settle down among the peasants and working men, and discharge the function of leaven to raise them to the revolutionary pitch;<sup>1</sup> about the relative merits of a social and a political upheaval; about the separation of the working man from the intellectuals; and about the part which terrorism should be made to play in the coming purification of the Russian world. My friend the student B. and I never actually joined any secret society, but we listened to the general discussions with something more than mere interest, and we never hesitated between a political change and the social debacle preached by the uncompromising pioneers who quoted Bakunin. S. K. on the other hand, ever uncompromising in theory, favoured Bakunin's programme, and often quoted these words of the master, "Let us put our faith in the eternal spirit which pulls down and annihilates only because he is the inscrutable and creative source of all life. The desire to destroy is at the same time a creative desire." Among an extreme section of the party known as "The People's Will" this doctrine was assimilated and when possible practised with deep-reaching consequences. The seed sown in those days produced the fruits we beheld in 1905-6 and in 1917.

The first attempt at terrorism that took place while I was in the country was made by Vera Zassulitch who, belonging to no party, travelled on her own initiative all the way from the Volga to the capital, fired at the Prefect of St. Petersburg, General Trepoff, and severely wounded him because, accord-

<sup>1</sup> This injunction was religiously carried out by a number of ardent spirits of both sexes who grudged no effort, shrank from no sacrifices to reach the hearts and brains of the lower classes. Sophia Perovskaya went among the working women of the capital, subsequently joined the terrorists, and finally was hanged for the murder of Alexander II. I looked upon her face as she was being taken to the place of execution. Officers like Shishka abandoned the army and became factory hands. Altogether no fewer than three thousand apostles thus went among their own and their own received them not. The peasants and the workers looked with contemptuous wonder upon these political missionaries.

ing to statements published in the daily paper, he had had a political prisoner flogged. This audacious deed sent a thrill of satisfaction over the entire nation. The girl was tried for the offence before a jury and acquitted, whereupon excitement rose to white heat. The authorities ordered her immediate re-arrest, but she was nowhere to be found. The Minister of Justice, a conscientious German, Count Pahlen, had to resign. The police arrested crowds of people, many were deported to Siberia without trial, and terror from on high begot terror from below. I well remember the August day when Stepniak stabbed Mezentseff in St. Petersburg, and the flushed cheeks and flaming eyes of S. K. who hastened to me with all the particulars at his fingers' ends and assured me that this was but the overture. In effect the Tsar himself was the next target of the terrorists and a student his would-be assassin. Five shots from a revolver were fired at the Emperor from a moderate distance, but Alexander's hour had not struck. The attempt was not unforeseen. The revolutionists had formally condemned the monarch to death, apprised him of the sentence, and added that his only hope of escape was to bestow constitutional government on the country. This move bespoke a change of programme. Instead of social, political renovation was now demanded. The terrorists who had been theretofore working exclusively for a social burst-up won the support, by accepting the aims, of the Liberals who clamoured for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. The Liberals testified their reconciliation by a bootless effort to induce the government to commute the death sentence on the would-be assassin of the Tsar into banishment to Siberia.

For victory in the struggle that now ensued the secret police of the "Third Section" relied on its spies, agents provocateurs, and its power to punish the discontented administratively. But the conspirators were dauntless and resourceful in their schemes against the monarch's life, which, although baulked continually, were resumed with unflagging ardour. Time after time a chance discovery, a

precaution neglected, a trick of fate saved the Emperor—some unforeseen accident always—who had been encouraged to believe that the danger he ran was only apparent. But when one evening the apartment under his dining-room in the Winter Palace was blown to splinters at the moment when he would have been sitting at table had he not been delayed unexpectedly, he awoke to the conviction that the only way to ensure his safety and escape his enemies was to look into their demands and see how far he could prudently go towards satisfying them. This conclusion marked a turning point in his policy. He promoted the Governor-General of Kharkoff, Loris Melikoff, to be president of a committee to carry on the home government, invested him with almost dictatorial powers, and ordered him to elaborate a project of far-ranging reform. Unfortunately this good resolution was unknown to the terrorists, who fancied that the external change meant but greater intensity in coercion.

Loris Melikoff was well intentioned and fairly well informed, but the revolutionary party knew of no reason why it should trust him. An early and hasty attempt was even made on his life. I, who was living on a footing of cordial friendship with the leading Armenians of St. Petersburg, with Delyanoff, the Esoffs, Patkanoff, etc., etc., learned a good deal of what was going on behind walls and doors. From the utterances of Professor Gradoffsky on the other hand, who was spoken of as Melikoff's secretary, I could gauge the suspicions of the Liberal party, and by S. K. I was apprised in a general way that a wide web was believed to be woven by the terrorists round the Tsar, in the meshes of which he would probably be caught.

Melikoff's conception was businesslike and his way of executing it tactful. On the one hand he was loth to scare the Emperor by a far-reaching project sprung upon him without warning, and on the other hand neither the gist nor the details of his moderate scheme must be allowed to leak out prematurely lest the reactionary press, headed by the redoubted Katkoff, should organise a national opposition. What the virtual dictator had in view was to increase the

powers of the zemstvos, to authorise them to co-operate with each other throughout the Empire, and thus to enable them to create an intelligent representative assembly. That seemed to outsiders who were free from bias to be the right step at that conjuncture. I confess that my own mind was not quite made up at the time, partly because I was not sure of the data, and partly because I was a reader of the writings of Katkoff whom I knew personally. I also enjoyed the advantage of listening occasionally to Dostoyeffsky's diatribes and perusing his dull periodical, and S. K. was never tired of telling me that nothing must be expected from the crown except decrees of banishment to Siberia, nor from the revolutionists barring the martyrdom of some and the treachery of others. One thing alone was clear to me: a social upheaval would endanger the very existence of the Empire. The utmost that the cultural level of the nation would admit of was a moderate political change.

In the meantime, the two enemies went their respective ways, the terrorists plotting the death of the Tsar, and the Tsar making up his mind to yield what the terrorists had demanded, and even to contemplate its corollary, a genuine parliament. At last Loris Melikoff completed his project and secured the Emperor's assent to it about the same time that the conspirators had put the final touch to theirs. On Saturday, 12th March, 1881, I was sauntering down the Nevsky Prospekt with my Professor of Armenian, Patkanian, and we were about to cross the Morskaya, a street leading to the palace, when the police suddenly stopped us in order to let the imperial sleigh glide past. At close quarters we saluted Alexander II. Mechanically he returned the greeting, looking pensive and weary as he glided shadow-like from before our eyes. "I should feel sorry to be in that man's shoes to-day," whispered Professor Patkanian to me, as we moved out of ear-range of the police. "Why to-day?" I asked. "Don't you know," he replied, "that Loris Melikoff is very anxious about the Tsar's safety? They have discovered another plot, this time a formidable affair, and have arrested the principal conspirators. But the others are

still at large, and may yet carry out their scheme unless Loris baffles it. He is all the more worried about it that the Emperor refuses to submit to rational measures of precaution. He has besought him to stay indoors for a few days, but the Tsar is reckless. Loris is worried."

The next day I was in the mined house<sup>1</sup> which would have been blown to smithereens had the Tsar, who had just signed and sanctioned the desired reform, driven down the Nevsky. But instead he went along the Moika. I reached the fatal spot a few minutes after the bombs had exploded, the victims had fallen, and the dying Tsar had been taken to the Winter Palace. I saw the blood on the snow and crowds of old women dipping handkerchiefs or clothes in it and reverently making the sign of the cross. I stood in front of the palace an hour or two later in the midst of a dense throng waiting for the monarch to show himself, for he was believed to have escaped intact or with a slight wound. And I then had another opportunity to observe the peasant's true character as it revealed itself when temporarily freed from outside restraint. As I stood that memorable afternoon among the crowd in the snow, my eyes fixed on the balcony from which the monarch was wont on exceptional occasions to greet or address the people, there were two students near me who were talking in a tone that denoted indifference, callousness, or satisfaction. Now and again they broke into a laugh. I could not hear anything they were saying, but I noticed that the one nearest to me was particularly light-hearted and blithe. All at once I heard the rasping tones of a dvornik's<sup>2</sup> voice shouting, "What do you mean?" followed by the subdued response of one of the students, then a chorus of angry voices waxing louder and louder around the pair. A violent push past me where the students stood, a hustling movement, some cynical ejaculations, and

<sup>1</sup> In the same house there was a joint-stock concern of which Patkanian was a director, and I had an appointment there with him at the very hour when the whole place was to have been blown up had the Tsar returned that way.

<sup>2</sup> A dvornik, literally the "gate keeper," is one of several house janitors whose duties were to carry fuel to the flats, take the passports to the police, watch at the gates all night, and spy on the inmates of the house.

then a sequence of awful screams that froze one's blood were the only sights and sounds that reached me of the revolting tragedy that had been enacted almost by my side. The two students had been seized first by the ears which were pulled away, and then torn limb from limb. Sick at heart I returned home to learn that a blood bath was apprehended, as the dvorniks and other peasants had announced their intention of killing every well-dressed person in the capital. That was my first insight into what is connoted by the elemental ferocity of the people. I began to understand how essential are outward restraints to good, nay, to human behaviour in those benighted masses. Neither the doctrines of Christ nor the instincts of humanity had been cultivated by their leaders. The people had for ages seen robbery, murder, in a word all kinds of crime, political, private, and absolutely wanton outrages perpetrated in the name of God, the Tsar, and the fatherland by their own educated and spiritual guides. Is it to be wondered at that whenever they had the chance in turn to rob and burn and torture and kill they used it to the full relentlessly?

As soon as the Emperor's death became known, Petersburg fell into a state of chaotic confusion. The city was surrounded by a military cordon. Incongruous self-contradictory measures were framed, discussed, adopted, and dropped. The brains of the rulers seemed paralysed. But one official remained as cool and detached as if nothing had happened. This man of nerve and resource was Plehve, the public prosecutor, destined soon to become Director of the Police Department, then Dictator of Russia and an instrument of Fate in her downfall. A thousand tongues anathematised the regicides and discussed ingenious measures of public safety. Students were badly mauled in the streets of the cities and a publican mistaken for a student was beaten to death before my eyes. From out of the din and tumult two alternative policies took definite shape and presented themselves to the new Emperor—the execution of his father's plan or a fresh spell of "resolute government," and he unhesitatingly announced his preference for the former.

Many of the eminent people whom I met most frequently in those days, Katkoff, Pobiedonostseff, Philippoff, the Metropolitan Archbishop of St. Petersburg, Delyanoff, Komaroff, were ranged on the side of the autocracy and preached a crusade against the reform scheme which the Tsar proposed to carry out. Impressed by their attitude he first submitted it to his ministers in order to learn from their lips what results they expected it to yield. A majority warmly declared for it and, curiously enough, the Grand Duke Vladimir was one of its most convinced spokesmen. I was personally acquainted with most of the others,<sup>1</sup> but nearly half the votes were on the opposite side.

The leader of the dissentients, the celebrated K. Pobiedonostseff, whose disinterested brooding over the cavernous depths of human nature impressed the Emperor, was a host in himself. It was my privilege to meet this remarkable man over and over again during those historic days and later. After the Council of Ministers<sup>2</sup> at which Melikoff's reform project was debated, I heard him on the subject and watched him intently while he talked. For he looked like a man possessed. His eyes were wild and his voice hollow like that, say, of Samuel raised from the dead. One such scene in particular made a deep dent on my memory. He had been inveighing against Loris Melikoff, and asserting that the outcome of his project would be to turn over the Empire and its destinies to the scoundrels who had slain its protector and Tsar, and would fain annihilate all checks and restraints, divine and human. And clutching his head with his hands he repeatedly exclaimed, "They are mad, stark mad." Bessarion Komaroff who was present remarked, "It is for you to protect your imperial pupil from their folly." "Ah! if only the Emperor would listen to me." "Have you doubts about it then?" "I am sure of nothing. The decision lies with him. He has heard my views and also those of Mil-yutin & Co. And he is hesitating between the two courses. At first he seemed ready to ratify the sinister scheme, but

<sup>1</sup> Saburoff, Nabokoff, Solsky, Abaza, and Milyutin.

<sup>2</sup> Held on 20th March, 1881.

happily he postponed the execution. And now we can still hope, but only hope." Then turning to Komaroff, the editor of the oldest journal in St. Petersburg, and to myself, who was then one of its leader writers, he said, "The press has much to answer for and much to make good. You must go to work and help us. There is no time to be lost." The press had already gone to work with vigour and, in the case of the Moscow thunderer Katkoff, with virulence. Intrigues increased and multiplied and were conducted with profound secrecy by the reactionaries. The Liberal ministers were listless and self-satisfied, relying upon the Tsar's approval of the reform, expressed after his father's death and accompanied by his promise to carry it out. He would not go back on his word after that, they said. They also thought he needed time to accustom himself to the concession. And they waited. The others worked.

While the Tsar was hesitating between two courses Fate in its ironical mood played a trick which probably decided him. The reform which had actually been assented to by Alexander II. had, as we saw, been hindered by the very men who were sacrificing money, liberty, life, to attain it—the revolutionists. And now again, just when it was about to be confirmed, had, in fact, been confirmed in writing by the Tsar<sup>1</sup> and the ministers, these same revolutionists through their executive committee sent him a long-winded, arrogant, and argumentative letter<sup>2</sup> taking credit for the murder of his father, but assuming that the son would see eye to eye with them and concede to vulgar threats what they fancied had been denied to reason. They ended their missive with a demand for a representative body to be chosen by free general election and, until the voting ceased, for liberty of the press, of speech, and of meeting. I received a copy of this curious document from S. K., who remarked that its effect on the Emperor would be like that of the red cloth on the bull in the ring. "There is now no hope of a

<sup>1</sup> By a remark penned on the project and by his announcement to the Grand Duke Vladimir.

<sup>2</sup> Dated 10th/22nd March, 1881.



constitution," he added. "The executive committee of the revolutionary party is composed of downright fools."

Rumours which ran wild in those troublous days credited the celebrated General Skobelev with a sudden dictatorial impulse to which he was said to be giving reinless scope when chance or design removed him from the scene. There was no doubt that he was supremely dissatisfied with the course things political were taking, and it was known that he had sulkily refused a post offered to him by Boris Melikoff. I, who was then one of the representatives of the anti-German tendency in the Russian press, and was also in touch with an officer who was Skobelev's intimate friend and boon companion, was well aware of that. According to the improbable story current, he harboured a plan to march at the head of a body of devoted troops, surround the Winter Palace, arrest the Tsar, and proclaim a constitution. In order the better to execute this scheme he took Count Nicholas Ignatieff, who had been Ambassador to Russia, into his confidence, and Ignatieff first approached Melikoff on the subject, but receiving no encouragement from that quarter, and fearing to be compromised, he denounced the plot to the Tsar. Such was the rumour. But the project was so utterly out of touch with all the circumstances that in the absence of good evidence, which is lacking, I shrink from ascribing it to a man like Skobelev. For although ambitious he was also shrewd, had everything to lose by the probable failure of the scheme, and little or nothing to gain by its success which was doubtful. His sudden death, attributed to poison, has been instanced as a corroborative circumstance, but Skobelev's life—a life like that of my fellow-student at the lectures on Genesis—explains his death quite as satisfactorily as the assumption that he fell by the hand of a member of the Holy League.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly two months passed in doubt and hesitation before the new Tsar made up his mind what course to strike out.

<sup>1</sup>A secret society for the protection of the person of the Tsar, consisting of members of the nobility presided over by the Grand Duke Vladimir, who agreed to adopt the methods of the terrorists, but appear to have shrunk from redeeming their pledge.

In the end Pobiedonostseff won him over to autocracy and received the order to draw up a manifesto to the nation announcing the fateful decision, which was duly signed and promulgated.<sup>1</sup> Loris Melikoff and some of his colleagues, who had not been informed of the Emperor's gradual conversion to the old ideas and had no foreknowledge of the manifesto, resigned and fell into disfavour. The revolutionists were roused to fury by the new course which was entered upon after so much deliberation, persevered in with firmness, and sustained with more method and thoroughness than is usual in Russian politics. Their anger was impotent, however, against the systematic precautions adopted by the new government, and they no longer had the sympathy of the people, without which no great Liberal movement could lead to practical results. The terrorists had overshot the mark and defeated their object, and new problems of absorbing interest in the economic domain received actuality and diverted public attention to other channels. Thus closed a thrilling chapter of Russian history which may be epitomised as a waste of energy for lack of vision. The government reproached the revolutionists with being out of touch with the people whose aims and strivings they misunderstood, and the revolutionists hurled back the taunt. Both were right. In the meanwhile the people's attitude towards the two adversaries resembled that of Candide towards Pangloss when he set forth his proofs that this is the best of all possible worlds, "*Cela est bien dit, mais il faut cultiver notre jardin.*"

<sup>1</sup> On 11th May.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE RULE OF THE BUREAU

"My ideas about a change of regime and the kindred proposals that have been the cause of so much hatred and bloodshed," said Pobiedonostseff, the Mentor of Alexander III., "are neither new nor complex"—he was talking to a knot of three or four persons including Komaroff and myself. "What a government ought to aim at is the happiness of the people. Now the elements of happiness vary with the different peoples and with their degrees of culture. What is needed in a legislator, therefore, besides a knowledge of the nation's actual requirements, is skill in adjusting his measures to these—this rather than a spirit of system. The Russian people differ widely from western nations both to their advantage and their disadvantage, and because they differ no one formula can be safely applied to both. Call our peasants unsophisticated or uncivilised in the European sense, if you will, the fact remains that neither their spiritual instincts nor their moral restraints are adequate to subdue the ferocious passions that lie dormant in their breasts without the aid of physical sanctions. That is the leading fact and it should receive due weight. To a large extent our Church is answerable for this backwardness. What any government worth its salt must do, then, is to see that the Christian spirit is infused into the Church and keep the revolutionary poison from entering the veins of the nation. This does not involve stagnation. Progress there certainly must be, but it will have to be marked by ordered gradation. The triumph of Liberalism to-day would be the dissolution of the bonds that keep the community together and would entail decomposition."

These were the maxims that inspired Pobiedonostseff's policy at its best. But they remained maxims to the end. It was not until the middle of the next reign that he regretfully

admitted the impossibility of carrying out any coherent policy of regeneration for lack of qualified instruments. And these he had failed to find in Russia. What he had also overlooked was the impossibility, under his own system, of obtaining such agents, and if there had been any, of setting them feasible tasks. For the autocracy had by this time become a mere name for government by myriads of petty officials, each of whom worked separately under hardly any local and no central control, actuated by sordid motives and devoid alike of loyalty to the State and of a sense of duty. If the constitutional reform approved by Alexander II. had been embodied in institutions, and if the zemstvos, entrusted with fuller powers, had then been allowed to co-operate organically with each other, effective supervision and fruitful government would have been at least possible during a brief period of transition. By Pobiedonostseff's methods they were eliminated. The innovation inaugurated by this statesman consisted of a set of artificial checks and counter-checks of which the only justification was the perpetuation of the autocracy—and the principal result was to fortify the bureaucracy and render it more of a parasite than before. It is fair to recognise that the State at that epoch had no other means of defence at its disposal. The curse of Russia had from the beginning of her history been the absence of effective moral restraints and the operation of mechanical substitutes. And now by way of bettering the plight to which the nation was thereby reduced it was proposed to increase the mere mechanical deterrents. Accordingly the individual and the community were called on to surrender their interests, aims, thoughts to salaried conscience-keepers, who were bereft of self-respect and often of moral integrity. General dissatisfaction was the immediate consequence; the final outcome was the abysmal plunge.

None the less the experiment was protracted throughout the entire reign of Alexander II. and a great part of that of his successor. The new Tsar, who had refused to consolidate the State and weaken the bureaucracy by means of the zemstvos, which he considered dangerous, appointed a

complete set of chiefs for every department of public life and for every class of the population. Take one instance. The peasants, when serfs, had had but slight relations with the State and only indirectly through their masters. From the autocratic point of view this was a distinct advantage, for it simplified government by centralisation. But it lasted only as long as serfdom. Now that the emancipated peasants were being disaffected by terrorist propagandists and others, the Home Secretary devised a class of guardians<sup>1</sup> to shield them, whose sole qualification was nobility of birth, officials who were answerable only to the minister, and to these power was given over the bodies and souls of nine-tenths of the population. It was within the discretion of the new chiefs to rob and flog and persecute their wards; many of them used the power without ruth, and went so far as deliberately and arbitrarily to hinder even agricultural development, the spread of instruction, and liberty of religious thought and creed. This new order of bureaucrats was in the nature of a final touch to a policy which drove the country out of its natural course and set it moving towards the abyss. For the emancipation of the serfs by bringing the government and the masses into direct communication necessitated a vast increase in the number of officials, each of whom, more or less independent of the government, wielded a certain degree of irresponsible power. So enormous was the mass of reports, edicts, warnings, and comments which passed between the centre and the circumference that the former could not possibly exercise supervision over the latter. The crying injustice and the farcical intermezzos that resulted would fill volumes.

I remember vaguely the case of a landed proprietor who, having mortgaged his estate and become insolvent, was unable to pay the interest to the State Bank. After the usual formalities the land and manor were to be put up for auction. He appealed to the Emperor for time to scrape together the amount of his debt, but in vain. One of his friends then advised him to go to a certain *pissar*<sup>2</sup> in the department—

<sup>1</sup> *Zemskiyé Natshalmiki* or district chiefs. <sup>2</sup> Scrivener, copyist, amanuensis.

an amanuensis who received some sixty pounds a year—and offer him a hundred roubles for his help. He took the advice, paid the money, and had ample time to collect the requisite sum. The *pissar* through whose hands the order passed deliberately transformed the address on the envelope into a town in eastern Siberia by the change of two letters. The decree ordering the sale was despatched to the far east of the Tsardom and several months elapsed before the “mistake” was discovered and corrected. In this way the estate was saved.

It was the segregation of the bureaucracy and the immense power it conferred upon irresponsible nobodies that ultimately drove in the wedge between it and the crown which finally contributed to split the structure of the State. If instead of devising the class of district chiefs or local tsarlets who made the confusion much worse than before, the government had reverted to the scheme of Alexander II. and set existing public bodies like the *zemstvos* to discharge the functions of intermediaries and to co-operate with each other, a step would have been taken in the right direction, but it is doubtful whether at that late period Russia's evolution would have progressed in its historic course. Count N. P. Ignatieff, who became, for a short time, Minister of the Interior, discerned this possibility and suggested to Alexander III. the adoption of the political reform drafted by Loris Melikoff. But the idea was scouted by the Tsar's reactionary counsellors, Pobiedonostseff and Dmitry Tolstoy, whereupon Ignatieff had to withdraw into private life for the remainder of his days. Thus at irregular periods from the reign of Catherine II. downwards, Russian monarchs manifested velleities of internal reform, but the piratical spirit of the State stifled all such beginnings.

Too much stress cannot be laid on the fact that from time immemorial political Russia has consisted of two classes, the masters and their workers, between whom yawned an abyss almost as wide as that between Spartan citizens and helots.

Military force and a certain proportion between the

rulers' striving for territorial expansion and their achievements kept the arrangement from breaking down. From early days onward to the reign of Ivan the Terrible the force was directed mainly against internal enemies, independent principalities, or the Tartars, while the masses were left largely to their own resources. The ruler invariably struck up a tacit partnership with the soldiers, his instruments for the extension and maintenance of his power, and in virtue of this partnership they became materially interested in his success, being certain of a large part of the booty. It should be borne well in mind that this co-operative system, with seasonable modifications, has been the type of regime in Russia down to the revolution of 1917. Thus Ivan the Terrible was served by his guards—*oprichniki*—who benefited very extensively by his conquests. Peter transformed the *oprichchina* into an army, and the rude system of civil service into a bureaucratic hierarchy whose principal function it was to bind together the conflicting elements of the Empire and keep their centrifugal tendencies permanently under control.

This system yielded for a time all the good of which it was capable, but it was always in danger of degenerating into organised parasitism. So long, however, as the central authority was able to survey and direct the doings of its agents the mechanism worked with passable smoothness. But the bureaucracy was swamped by a deluge of new officials after the emancipation of the serfs by Alexander II., and when his successor aggravated the evil by appointing a host of intermediaries invested with practically unlimited power the bureaucracy ceased to be the organ of the autocrat, and rapidly became a monstrous parasite which preyed on the body of the Russian nation and lived for itself alone.

In this respect there was a striking contrast between the Tsardom and the Kaiserdom. For in spite of its kinglets, princes, and grand dukes, Germany is a federation of twenty-six independent States governed each one by its own conscientious administration which is thoroughly acquainted with its needs, capacities, and temper, and is able to play

upon all its chords with the certainty of evoking the wished-for response. Nowhere do the Saxons, the Bavarians, or the other independent peoples come into actual contact with the obnoxious forms of imperial absolutism. These are caught and transformed by the local government organism which has the welfare of the people at heart. The Tsardom, on the contrary, lay heavy on each province, nationality, religion, tribe, and individual, and rendered progress well-nigh impossible and existence difficult.

It was to free the people from that mighty vampire that the revolution was conceived by the intellectuals. The fundamental error committed by its promoters was that they treated the masses as Ivan the Terrible had treated his opritchniki, and offered them a share in the booty—the land—whereupon the people contented itself with reversing the existing system, or rather democratising it, and took to preying on the classes that possessed land, fortune, culture.

Among the various revolutionary agencies which were at work since I first went to Russia, the most unpretending, indirect, and effective were certain religious sectarians. For many years I was the spokesman in the west of religious communities which were being ground in the dust by Pobiedonostseff's autocratic steam-roller.<sup>1</sup> Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Old Believers, Stundists, Dookhobortsy were all in turn the victims of oppression. But the sects which were penalised with the utmost ferocity of theological hatred were those rationalistic creeds which apply unrestricted criticism to revealed religion, freely draw their own practical conclusions and apply these to all the problems of life. For the Russian is a born dialectician who pursues an argument to its uttermost corollary without qualification or reserve. He recoils from no conclusion. The circumstance that the upshot is an absurdity is, in his eyes, no test of the falseness of his premises. Hence the astounding tenets and brutal practices of many of the most wide-spread religious communities such as the self-mutilators, the suicidal sects, and the Khlysty from whom Rasputin took some of his doctrines.

<sup>1</sup> The articles in question appeared in the *Fortnightly*, *Contemporary*, and *National Reviews*.



Now the rationalistic denominations made no distinction between politics and religion in the application of their critical solvents. They applied the same test to both. Some of them, like the Dookhobortsy, denounced war as a crime, forbade their adepts to don military uniform, refused to pay taxes, and generally prescribed limits beyond which obedience to the State became sinful. Obviously these rivals to the government could not be tolerated by Pobiedonostseff, engaged as he then was on a delicate experiment of the highest import. But he made no distinction between these groups and others whose members were more law-abiding. Hence the history of the religious movement of the reign is a chronicle of relentless persecution on the one hand and of Russian heroism on the other, and in its political aspect a chapter of the origins of the breakdown of the entire framework of Tsarism.

Coercion in religious matters did more to spread political disaffection than the most enterprising revolutionary propagandists. It turned the best spirits of the nation against the tripartite system of God, Tsar, and fatherland, and convinced even average people not only that there was no life-giving principle in the State, but that no faculty of the individual or the nation had room left for unimpeded growth. Whithersoever one turned progress was barred by artificial obstacles. Schools, universities, the bar, the law courts, the press, the church and the chapel, the peasants' reunions, the zemstvo assemblies were so many narrow cages in which thought as well as action were caught and confined. The bulk of the nation felt the economic pressure of this gigantic incubus most painfully, for except in the religious domain it was rare that curiosity of an intellectual character made itself felt among the peasants, and then it generally assumed grotesque shapes. The moral and intellectual condition of the people had not perceptibly changed since their first appearance in history, and it was clear to the student of national psychology that its manifestations, whenever the tight bonds of the bureaucracy should snap, were certain to vie in lawlessness and savagery with those of the pre-

Christian era. This was a momentous aspect of the problem which was entirely neglected by all countries of the west. Another was to be found in the unwonted social conditions which were being created and fostered by Witte's policy of industrialisation. The need for canalising and regulating the new forces thus springing into life was fast growing peremptory, but the only agencies devised by the government to cope with them were those of the police and the Orthodox Church. By these queer educators myriads of the Tsar's subjects were being systematically pinioned and cooped in ways so hateful that vast forces of revolt and destruction were generated and stored up against the day of reckoning.

It was the regenerated Church that Pobiedonostseff hoped to use as a compensating counter-force to the defects of the State and the drawbacks of its new economic policy. But the instrument broke in his hands. The orthodox Russian Church could not yield the regenerative virtue which itself did not possess. For it was but an interesting relic of the past. Even when first brought from Byzantium to Kieff it was little more than a set of old forms and ceremonies which the primitive Slavs were forced by their ruler to adopt. The one spark of vitality that still glowed among its dry ashes was the spirit of asceticism that dovetailed admirably with the natural religion of the tribes which Vladimir, their prince, drove into the Byzantine fold. An intimate friend of mine, one of the most Christian distinguished members of the Russian Church, whose life was dedicated to the work<sup>1</sup> of freeing it from the deforming crust of ages, affirms that it lacks a truly spiritual government. "The Russian Church," he wrote, "bereft of support and of a centre of unity outside the State, became of necessity subject to the secular power . . . and unavoidably ended in anti-Christian absolutism." From the tenth century, when it was transplanted in Slav soil, down to the present day Russian orthodoxy has been singularly devoid of intellectual and, indeed, moral

<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Solovieff. I possess two studies of his on theological questions which he wrote in my note books during the meetings at which he, A. Pashkoff, and myself were wont to discuss philosophical, theological, and political questions in St. Petersburg.

life and movement. The gropings of individual and collective God-seekers among the ignorant people proceeded—as I maintained against Tolstoy's Christian theory—from the natural bent of the Slav character towards mysticism and morbid introspection pushed to its extreme consequences. Hence the multiplicity of strange barbarous sects that bring one back, not only to the feats of Simon Stylites, but to the still more awful penances of the great Indian ascetics who by dint of cruel self-torture surmounted titanic obstacles and won for themselves the state of godhead.

The organisation of the Russian Church, but not its dogmas or practices, has varied with that of the secular governments. Since the days of Peter, who tolerated no rivals, it has had no visible head other than the Tsar. By that reformer the patriarchate was abolished and a synod of bishops instituted in its stead, to each of whose members an oath was administered by which he acknowledged the sovereign as the supreme judge of the convocation. And by way of stifling all tendencies to independence the hierarchy of the clergy was divided into ranks corresponding to the military grades, so that a metropolitan archbishop is equal to a "full general," an archbishop to a lieutenant-general, whereas a secular clergyman, do what he may, cannot hope to swing himself into a higher rank than that of colonel.

I long occupied a favourable post of observation from which to study the working of the Church mechanism, for I was honoured not only with the friendship of Vladimir Solovieff, the one great theologian<sup>1</sup> and moral philosopher Russia has produced, but also with that of Isidore, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Petersburg and Finland, of the Metropolitans Plato of Kieff, Ambrose of Kharkoff, Nikanor of Kherson, Michael of Serbia, and of the clerical laymen Tertius Philippoff, Professor Cayetan Kossowicz, Athanasius Bytchkoff, and others. I was the private adviser of the Metropolitan Isidore during one of the most interesting epochs of his life, heard his criticism of

<sup>1</sup> Before I met Solovieff, in the reign of Alexander II., I had studied the theological writings of Khomyakoff. But they are the work of an amateur who read a number of foreign treatises on Church history.

Pobiedonostseff, who vainly endeavoured to get rid of him by sending him to a monastery, and his shrewd observations on the Tsar Alexander III. and the Tsaritsa. A certain amount of his foreign correspondence passed through my hands. I once composed an encyclical letter in his name addressed to all orthodox and other Christian Churches throughout the world, and having had it approved by him and signed for promulgation, it occurred to me that Pobiedonostseff would protest against the innovation, which implied a sort of supremacy of the metropolitan over the Russian Church, and would force the prelate to resign. Without giving this as my reason for withholding the letter which I still possess as a curiosity I wrote a differently worded and less ambitious pastoral over the archbishop's signature which was duly published.<sup>1</sup>

I also carried on a correspondence, on behalf of that prelate, with several representative members of the Anglican Church, including bishops and archbishops, mainly on the subject of the reunion of their respective communions. In the intervals the archbishop and myself calmly talked the matter over in its theological and political aspects. The prelate was a shrewd self-educated peasant whose acquaintance-ship with theology and Church history was superficial, but whose knowledge of Russia and human nature was thorough. He saw distinctly that the line of cleavage between the two Churches was not really theological, and that even if it were, it could not be obliterated for lack of a central authority to pronounce judgment. As the problem was largely political he knew that even Pobiedonostseff himself was powerless to solve it. Finally he perceived that the Russian Church could not move in the matter without the support of the other branches of orthodoxy which might not be obtainable. And he nearly always ended up these discussions with the words, "We need not insist on these things in our correspondence. They—the Anglicans—must not be scared. After all they are well-meaning and also, I am told, generous people, and I want to appeal to them for help for my orthodox mission in Japan. Lay stress, therefore, on our

<sup>1</sup> At first in the *Daily Telegraph*.

desire to work for reunion and allude to the question of orders which is admittedly a solid hindrance."

This venerable prelate, who captivated me by his racy language, his rare shrewdness, and his delightful outspokenness, was wont to say that no one could understand the Russian people who had not studied their religious conceptions. A friend of his once suggested that I should apply for a professorship which had fallen vacant at the theological academy of Petrograd. Although I had no positive grounds for believing that it would be given to me, some friends urged me to present my application in writing, together with my qualifications, to the President of the Academy, Yanysheff, who was a *persona grata* at court in spite of his Lutheran leanings in theology. This I accordingly did. After the lapse of a considerable time he sent for me and said that a preliminary condition to my admission to compete for the professorship would be my conversion to the State Church. In vain my friends pointed out that a Jewish professor was actually teaching Hebrew there. The answer was that there was no parity between Hebrew and philosophy. The rule, therefore, was upheld and my candidature fell to the ground.

Thereupon my friend, the archbishop, strongly urged me to devote part of my life to the study of religion in Russia and to pay special care to the origins, growth, and influence of the various sects on the character and habits of the people. The speculations of Vladimir Solovieff, combined with the metropolitan's advice, led me to inquire closely into the history of the orthodox and heretical communions in the country, to read the epistles, narratives, and discourses of the early Russian writers, ecclesiastical and lay, to investigate the curious problems suggested by the countless and grotesque sects, and to find out from the sectarians themselves what human or peculiarly Russian needs were satisfied by their respective tenets and practices. In obtaining materials for these investigations I was assisted by the metropolitan archbishop and the Home Secretary, Count Dmitry Tolstoy, an atheist and ex-head of the Russian Church, through

whose intervention a number of important secret reports on sectarianism in the Empire <sup>1</sup> were communicated to me, bearing mainly upon what one might term the grotesque in religious aberrations.

It was while I was engaged in these studies that the work of regenerating the Russian people was undertaken by Pobiedonostseff, who had, meanwhile, become chief of the Most Holy Synod. This statesman hugged the delusion that political and social betterment in the autocratic sense would result from that uprising of religious sentiment which he was exerting himself to effect. He was an honest, selfless fanatic who would set his eyes on a goal and move towards it with steadfast tread without paying heed to the pitfalls in his path. Pobiedonostseff the layman was one of the few educated clericals in the Orthodox Church. To this institution he allotted a state mission for which, in so far as it was compatible with its natural functions, it could not be fitted in less than two or three generations. I may say at once that I was favourably impressed by his intentions and amazed by the warp that vitiated his judgment. He was the victim of an idea which, after the manner of so many of his countrymen, he deemed capable of universal application, the fusion of autocracy, orthodoxy, and nationalism in one trinitarian conception. This it was that stirred in him a praiseworthy endeavour to infuse religious *ichor* into the Church, which would enable it to accomplish its lofty mission and render the Russian people a sharer in mysterious grace of which it would have become the repository.

As liberty of conscience would be tantamount to the abandonment of this object it was withheld. In view of the process of disintegration going on in the Church and of the weakness of its spiritual and moral fibre, such freedom would sap its foundations and those of the autocracy with which it was indissolubly bound up. Moreover, disbelief in

<sup>1</sup> I was allowed to retain some of these reports only after having taken an oath and signed an undertaking to keep them always under lock and key. One work in especial, on the Sect of the Skoptsy, with copious illustrations, contains amazing revelations of the unnatural lengths to which a warped religious spirit will go.

Church dogmas, especially when accompanied, as in the rationalistic sects, by a critical attitude of mind towards all institutions and traditions, is, it was argued, hardly to be distinguished from disloyalty to the Tsar. Accordingly Pobiedonostseff refused to make a distinction. And yet he was not characterised by hardness of heart, but the problem which he tackled bristled with difficulties and provoked acts which put him often in contradiction with his better self. These painful dilemmas were sometimes reflected in official records. The Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synod, who, unlike his atheistic predecessor,<sup>1</sup> was a fervent believer, published every year a report on the progress of orthodoxy, the vicissitudes of its struggle with the revolted sectarians, and a plan of campaign for the immediate future. In these annuals he invariably underlined the necessity of "influencing the erring ones by meekness and mildness, in the spirit of tolerance, of Christian love and indulgence." On the other hand, however, he was wont to complain of the indulgence displayed by the secular arm, of the inaction of the civil administration, and of the apathy of the tribunals which, he maintained, sometimes connived at and even helped to spread the false doctrines. Education, religion, toleration, freedom of the press, co-operation of any kind among citizens, excepting Church sodalities, were judged to be incompatible with the good ordering of the realm.

I was much struck with the contradictions between words and deeds in which this policy involved Pobiedonostseff. In the year 1883 a law was passed allowing the Stundists—a sort of Baptist sect—to meet in and possess prayer halls on the same footing as the Old Believers,<sup>2</sup> and it also implicitly permitted members of the State Church to join their community. But in reality hard labour, banishment to a deadly climate, and loss of the custody of their children were among the penalties inflicted on those who forsook orthodoxy for Evangelical Christianity. The Stundists were on the

<sup>1</sup> Count Dmitry Tolstoy.

<sup>2</sup> A section of the Orthodox Church which differs from it only on trivial points of form.

blackest books of the Synod. "Uncommonly pernicious ecclesiastically and politically" was the label affixed to them by Pobiedonostseff. A Russian press organ of high standing<sup>1</sup> brandmarked later on the action taken against these and other religions as disgraceful. These sectarians, we read, "are not only prosecuted, but are hounded down after the fashion of the Middle Ages. Banishment to Siberia and Transcaucasia, confinement in monastery prisons, scourging with Cossack whips, military repressions like that of the Dookhobortsy in 1895, arbitrary injustice like the removal of the children of the Molokani from their parents' custody in 1897, frequent lynchings of sectarians by the artificially incited masses as in 1901,<sup>2</sup> these are a few of the facts which outline the legal status, or rather the outlawing of religious dissenters."<sup>3</sup>

One can readily imagine the influence on the impressionable population of Russia of these fanaticised people when forcibly dispersed over the Empire. For they were respected by their fellow-subjects, unlike the Dookhobortsy who refused to serve in the army, were flighty, and liable at times to fits of religious mania. The example of the Stundists was bracing. Their farms were well kept, their houses clean, their word was respected. Yet 200,000 of them were at one time making ready to emigrate in batches. To my knowledge many quitted their country. One of the most influential organs of the 'press wrote of them: "The Stundists have never refused to serve in the army or to pay taxes. They were and still are the most peaceful of our citizens; they are characterised by sobriety and clean living, by industry and love of order . . . and none the less they were accused of various 'propensities,' political and social, and the opinion of the Committee of Ministers<sup>4</sup> stigmatised them as 'especially pernicious.' Since then they have been deprived of their rights of praying together even in private apartments, huts, and other dwellings. Is such a state of

<sup>1</sup> *Russkia Vedomosti*, 16th December, 1904.

<sup>2</sup> In the provinces of Kieff and Kherson.

<sup>3</sup> *Russkia Vedomosti*, loco cit.

<sup>4</sup> The body which legislated for religious sects "in a tolerant spirit."



things normal, nay, is it even bearable?"<sup>1</sup> And yet it was in truth a necessity—if the Tsarist State was to be preserved.

The immediate consequence of this legislation was systematic law-breaking which, becoming a meritorious act, had a demoralising effect upon large sections of the population, and a further result was utter contempt of the government. Compelled to choose between a violation of what they believed to be God's precept and of sinful man's vagaries or malice, these latter-day saints made short work of the latter. In the sectarian diocese of Nishny Novgorod there were only twelve Stundist meeting places licensed by the authorities for about 75,000 persons, whereupon 172 others were opened illegally. Sixty such prayer halls were secretly established in the province of Vyatka. In this way millions of dissenters were turned into political offenders and the country was honeycombed with disaffection. For the principle of the State was that all Russians should be gently or roughly pushed into the true fold and get into contact with the Creator through the conducting medium of His lieutenant the Tsar.

The Old Believers, with whom I was in close contact, were in numerous cases forbidden to marry in their own church. Those who disregarded the prohibition were punished by a decree declaring their children bastards and their wives concubines. A Russian publicist who for years evinced an enlightened interest in ecclesiastical matters wrote of these, "They are devoid of the right of bringing up a family; they are debarred from the civil service; they are disqualified from praying. . . . All this I affirm positively, and without diverging a hair's breadth from the reality. When I read a letter from the Ural that the marriages of the Old Believers—whose domestic life is assuredly more serene, more modest, more pious than ours—are not recognised; that their wives, their mothers, their grandmothers, continue to be officially set down as spinsters; that the union of the husband and wife who have been married in accordance with the old Russian liturgy is termed fornication,

<sup>1</sup> *Russkoye Slovo*, 19th February, 1905.

just as are the unchaste bonds that link the drunkards and the thieves down in Gorky's Depths, I confess it made my hair stand on end. The Depths of Gorky, indeed! Here are the real depths. It is not merely that these people are said to live badly; but the law defines, classifies, and establishes such rules and regulations for them as though they were dogs, and denies them civil rights, even such an elementary right of mankind as that of having a family.

"The State is only wielding its right when it disqualifies for its service alike the hooligan from the depths and the honourable dissenting merchant, whom in this respect it sets on a level with the thief. For it may do what it likes with its own. But let the savage Samoyede from the Arctic circle on the one hand set about marrying his Samoyed woman, and the Russian nonconformist on the other hand wed the dissenting girl, and see then what happens. The former, as is known, prays to a wooden doll, and the latter to St. Nicholas, the Wonder-worker.<sup>1</sup> Yet the State says, 'I recognise the Samoyed marriage, but I declare that the dissenters are living in forbidden unchaste intimacy, and this mother of six and that mother of ten children are but spinsters guilty of fornication.'"<sup>2</sup>

The extent to which the persecution requisite to the success of Pobiedonoststeff's campaign was carried is hardly credible to any but those who witnessed it. I was asked once to approach that statesman or one of his colleagues on behalf of an orthodox priest named Tsvetkoff,<sup>3</sup> whose fixed idea was to emancipate the Church from her subservience to the lay elements and in particular to the State. Like so many of his countrymen he was a dialectician. He pointed out that one of the recent heads of the Most Holy Synod<sup>4</sup> was an atheist, that simony is a common and anti-Christian practice, that the Holy Synod is less a channel of divine grace than a department of the police, and that an œcumeni-

<sup>1</sup> The difference in the intercessors may appear, perhaps, less important to western peoples than to the eminent Russian writer.

<sup>2</sup> V. V. Rozanoff, *Novoye Vremya*, 17th February, 1905.

<sup>3</sup> Of the province of Tamboff,

<sup>4</sup> Count Dmitry Tolstoy,

cal council should be summoned without delay. It is not to be wondered at that the Holy Synod condemned Tsvetkoff to be interned in the monastery prison of Suzdal.<sup>1</sup> He was met at the threshold by the abbot, an ex-artillery colonel, who welcomed him with the words, "Hitherto you have been singing! Eh? Well, henceforth you will have to dance." The story of this priest's experience is valuable for the light it sheds on the ecclesiastical spirit that prevailed during the reign of Alexander III. and the first period of that of Nicholas II. and for the partial explanation it contributes of the upheaval that followed. For although it is true that the political and social revolutions of the year 1917 were at the outset the work of a minority, it may be laid down as an axiom that in the long run no political movement of importance could hope for even partial success unless it had the tacit support of the bulk of the people.

Tsvetkoff wrote down his impressions at the time and they were sent on to me. Here is the thrilling story in his own words: "A horrible feeling crept over me when this grave opened to receive me. It became more awful still when I began to realise where I was: I occupied a cell between two men who were stark mad. There was a little aperture in each door, and from time to time one or other of my neighbours would approach this opening and scream at the top of his voice. His ravings would be interlarded with horrible curses wreaked upon my head, the head of an impious heretic, and these shouts which gave me the shivers were kept up for thirty or forty minutes and more. Even now I shudder when I call them to mind. The soldiers on guard outside would gaze at me intently through the aperture, but none showed any pity. I used to ask them whether they suspected me or had anything to say to me, but then the eye at the hole would vanish for a time to appear soon after again. That, too, was torture.

"The military had it in their power to poison a prisoner's life, and they utterly poisoned mine. We were left entirely to their charge by the monks, who scarcely ever meddled.

<sup>1</sup> In the province of Vladimir.

Hence the soldiers could hinder a man from walking in the corridor, could prevent him from getting tea, and generally embitter his existence by petty persecution. But it was quite easy to win their favour by bribing whenever a prisoner had anything to give. I had nothing. I remember Podgorny, a member of the mystic sect of the Khlysty, who was imprisoned there, and as he had wealthy friends outside he often received cakes and other delicacies.

"At last I discovered from scraps of conversation among the soldiers that they took me for a madman. That was probably what they had been told. That discovery nearly unhinged my reason. When living outside I had often been threatened with imprisonment in Suzdal monastery prison, but I had never once realised that in that fortress there were veritable graves for the living. Now I knew it and shuddered. I was buried alive.

"The casemates of the fortress are dreadful stone cages. When I had spent a few hours in mine I thought I could not remain another month there and survive. But weeks passed and many months more. And day after day I had the feeling that I might break down at any moment, that I must break down very soon. In this way a twelvemonth lapsed and then another. I feared my reason was going. I was becoming desperate, and I took a desperate resolution after I had been about two and a half years in that miserable den.

"I wrote a declaration to Abbot Seraphim, setting forth that, although I had never been tried on any charge, yet here I was being punished as though guilty of infamous crimes. That was unjust, I said, and I protested against it with vigour. If I had done wrong let it be shown in what I had offended and I would bear my punishment as becomes a man. I therefore asked to be tried in public, and if not found guilty to be set free. But I must refuse to die piecemeal in a dungeon. Life was bereft of its meaning for me. It was more than I could bear. I informed the abbot, therefore, that unless I were shortly tried or set free I would abstain from food and die of hunger.

"To that letter I received no answer. I waited, but

Abbot Seraphim made no sign. It was as though he were leagues away. Then I set about fulfilling my resolution. On 13th November, 1903, I resolved to eat no more. Thenceforth the food which was brought to my cell remained untasted. My health began to ebb and soon failed. I ceased to move about. Languor and dreaminess came over me, and then the burning pangs of thirst. Hunger was terrible, but thirst was maddening. My tongue dried up, my lips were parched, and I thought I could see madness as a spectre. It was agonising torture. Then I pulled myself together, got up, and walked as well as I could to the end of the cell and reached up to the window where owing to the cold and dampness icicles were hanging down. I managed to break off some and melting them in my palms quenched my thirst. I knew a day would come when exhaustion would keep me lying down and I should have no icicles to quench the fire in my vitals. It was a horrible thought; altogether it was a painful process to die thus inch by inch, to lose hope after hope, without human sympathy or spiritual consolation, abandoned by heaven and earth. That is how it seemed at times when the outlook was most dismal."

Meanwhile Abbot Seraphim grew alarmed. A prisoner under his care was slowly starving himself to death in order to obtain justice. A word in time might hinder the tragedy. And it was his duty to get this word pronounced. He accordingly despatched a telegram to the Most Holy Synod, unfolding the facts and asking for instructions. Father Tsvetkoff was refusing food—would die of hunger in a few days unless he were removed from the fortress. Was it the will of the exalted body, which stands *in loco Christi*, that this man should be saved from death by an act of common justice, or that he should die? Those were certainly not the exact terms of his message, but they give the tenor of it. The answer, as he probably anticipated it, was not doubtful. Christian charity enjoined mercy as a duty and worldly prudence suggested it as a policy. Seraphim took the answer for granted, and removed his prisoner from the fortress to a monk's cell. And it was not a moment too soon.

Eighteen days of fasting and abstinence<sup>1</sup> had worn the priest to a skeleton. Pithless, bloodless, pinched, and powerless, he lay on the hard couch in his new abode. "I knew I should die if I ate much," he remarked, "so I took a little gruel that day and a little more on the day following. I meant to go back very gradually to normal diet." Meanwhile the reply from the Most Holy Synod was hourly expected. The Abbot Seraphim had telegraphed on the 2nd December, but strange to say the 4th December brought no answer before sundown. In the evening, however, a telegram was received from the Most Holy Synod. The abbot opened it, read it, and grew very agitated. It was impersonal, and these were the words of it: "The priest, Tsvetkoff, is to be again put back in the prisoners' section, and if he dies of hunger the Most Holy Synod is to be immediately informed, so that measures may be taken on its behalf relating to the funeral."

These instructions came like a thunderbolt from an azure sky. Even the shifty abbot, who thought he knew the world and the Most Holy Synod, was taken aback. The priest . . . merely steeled his will to die. He announced his determination to refuse food once more. Abbot Seraphim had no choice but to obey instructions, but he expressed his sympathy for his prisoner and assured him that he would at once write to St. Petersburg and leave nothing undone to have the cruel order rescinded. The danger was that success might come too late. Tsvetkoff continues: "I read that telegram as though it were my death warrant. Hopelessness mingled with the gloom and damp of my cell, but before abandoning myself to my fate I wrote my last will, requesting that no requiem service<sup>2</sup> be held for the repose of my soul. Then I settled down to the process of dying by hunger. One day<sup>3</sup> I was roused from my torpor and unexpectedly set free. Seraphim's advocacy had triumphed. I was released from the hateful fortress, but was compelled to

<sup>1</sup> From 15th November to 3rd December.

<sup>2</sup> Coming from an orthodox priest this was an odd, an heretical, injunction.

<sup>3</sup> 13th December.

occupy a cell in the monastery where I am still. I can take no step, say no word, cast no glance, but it is noticed and recorded. My health? It is broken up, I fear, for ever."

It should not be forgotten that these revolting iniquities were literally beyond count, nor that they were perpetrated with the approbation and for the behoof of the Church and the autocracy, the two sources of authority in the Empire. And yet Pobiedonostseff was not naturally a harsh man, he was only a Russian dialectician, a man who, when pressed into a tight place, confronted with a logical but absurd conclusion from his premises, and asked whether he will admit that, exclaims, "Well, and why not?" To me his answer when I approached him on the subject of the sectarians was exactly the same that I received several years later from the men who afterwards became Duma leaders when I adjured them to support Witte's administration and promised them on his behalf the power within a twelvemonth, "It is impossible." "But if you persist," I argued, "you will ruin your own cause, you will bring about results that must destroy it." "Well, Dr. Dillon, I really thought that you at least understood the character of our people. But now I see that I was mistaken."

Pobiedonostseff's instincts were on the side of organised authority, religious, moral, and political, and he honestly believed that its most effective organ is a single person. Unlike many other reformers he was not personally ambitious, in fact he merged his personality in the cause. He might have had the pick and choice of offices in the administration, but he contented himself with the least and kept as far in the background as was compatible with the exercise of his functions. He aspired to place the Russian State on a solid foundation, derived from its historic past, and to raise it to the highest place among the nations of Europe. This, too, was the principal object on which his colleague, Count Dmitry Tolstoy, as Home Secretary, exercised his ingenuity and concentrated his energy. They both saw clearly that the emancipation of the serfs had effected two great changes to the detriment of the autocracy. On the one hand it had

increased the numerical strength and extended the independence and irresponsibility of the bureaucracy so that the organism that should have supplied progress with motive power degenerated into a monstrous parasite that sucked the life blood of the nation. On the other hand it ruined the nobility economically and therefore politically, and compelled Tsarism either to seek the support of the masses or to revive the order of nobles, if indeed that order was still capable of coming back to life.

The two statesmen chose different props for the institution they wished to safeguard: Tolstoy, the atheist, put his trust in the nobility and began by bettering their material condition, founding a bank to minister to their needs, giving them exclusive rights to occupy posts as district chiefs and bend the peasantry to the government's aims, and he ended by awakening to the fatal circumstance that the nobility was politically dead and could not be resuscitated. Pobiedonostseff came slightly nearer to the correct formula, but was still so far off that the difference between them was negligible. Aware that the bulk of the nation was still backward and raw, he imagined that the Orthodox Church, which was identified with the principal organs of the national life, could win opinion and sentiment to the autocratic ordering of political and social arrangements and enable Tsarism to lean upon the bulk of the Russian nation. His ideal of the State was a sort of Slav Paraguay directed by the Orthodox clergy. He, too, was doomed to disappointment and failure because, for one thing, the Orthodox Church had never been an organic power in Russia, but a mere State department which invariably condemned dissent in the political sphere far more severely than conflicts in the region of belief. The notion that such an artificial institution should be able to leaven, transform, and ennoble the befogged anarchist masses and form a pedestal out of them for Tsarism was the golden dream of a visionary.

One day I expressed all this in courtly phraseology and in the form of an objection made by his opponents. "They are just as little acquainted with the Russian masses," he



answered, "as foreigners are. Our people differ from all others, and must be handled differently. What is meat to the British is poison to the Russian." The truth is that Pobiedonostseff, like his political adversaries and indeed like all Russian "intellectuals," misread the basic character of his own people and—what is still more extraordinary—of some of its most significant manifestations. He does not seem to have fully understood the nature of the State or the instincts of the masses. A lover of forms and a skilful sophist he was incapable of singling out the central issue of any problem.

I last met him at the close of his life when the grasp of autocracy on the country was loosening and the twilight of orthodoxy had set in. Pobiedonostseff, then in delicate health, was gloomy, querulous, despondent. But although he may have had an inkling of the magnitude of the calamities that were about to overwhelm his country, it may well be doubted whether he reckoned his own life-work as one of their contributory causes. And yet it is patent that his ideas were dissolvent and that the attempt to realise them by force accelerated the break-up of a society already profoundly disorganised. Autocracy, it is true, had long since become incompetent for any positive function, and the Russian Church had never been fitted for its spiritual mission. The sectarians, who at first had asked only to be allowed to pray and were being persecuted in the name of God and the Tsar, turned to political propaganda in order to obtain religious freedom, and in doing this tainted the masses with disaffection.

Politically the Russian people, since their appearance in history, have oscillated between absolutism and anarchism, and in the religious domain between sectarian asceticism and rank unbelief. What Pobiedonostseff did was to compromise orthodoxy and autocracy, to damage the cause of religion and of the Tsardom, to strengthen the bureaucracy at the expense of the monarch, to favour its parasitic instincts, and to undermine the principle of authority at its source.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE ADVENT OF NICHOLAS II

DURING the latter years of the tranquil reign of Alexander III. the drift of the Tsardom was manifestly in the direction of political change, but the course taken was mainly economic. Witte succeeded in introducing the gold standard which so many of his colleagues had declared impossible. Railways were rapidly being constructed, trade enlivened, and industries created and protected. The problems of wages, housing, and hygiene were openly mooted if not practically dealt with, and the standard of living for that section of the peasants which eked out their incomes from the land with the wages paid at the factory was rising fast, and the resentment of the many who had no resources but those which they drew from the soil sought passionate utterance in vain. Literature and journalism continued to radiate subdued heat as well as light, and the conduct of the international affairs of the nation was the stock text for the discreet strictures aimed at the State fabric. Publicists—I myself was at that time one of the fraternity—laid hold on every pretext and used all the skill they had acquired in the difficult art of writing forcibly between the lines to scatter the seeds of rebellion. And the seeds sank into the receptive minds of their readers to germinate with all the wildness and colour of Bakunin's ideas. In all this there was no attempt at limitation, at self-discipline, at what might be termed conservative reform. Even the oneness of the political organism with itself came in for no consideration—the centrifugal forces were fostered and strengthened, whenever and wherever possible, irrespective of the consequences.

Alexander III. was a physically sane, ethically upright, mentally shallow-brained man who behaved well according to his lights, which unhappily were dim and flickering.

Conscious of his mental limitations, he was honestly desirous of substituting the farthest reaching intellectual lights he could find for his own. But he chose in the main so badly that the mental element in the social organism was as warped as the ethical. When the tidings of his illness were flashed over the wires one might have distinguished, amid the excitement and curiosity of the nation, the stir of expanding human life and of wide interests that had ever been inarticulate.

I travelled to the Crimea to be near him, having been privately informed that he was seized with his last illness. Among my fellow-travellers in the train was the celebrated Father John of Cronstadt, a priest whom the irreligious described as a hypocritical knave and the pious revered as a latter-day saint. In spite of certain idiosyncrasies he had never separated himself from the Orthodox Church and he had conferred upon it the embarrassing privilege of having a worker of miracles in its fold. I had met him before in private houses, whither he had gone to pray and if possible to heal. He sometimes announced a cure and sometimes hinted at an approaching dissolution, but never laid claim to superhuman powers. So eagerly was he sought after that a female impresario arranged the order of his visits weeks in advance, and precedence was generally accorded to those who made the largest donations—for works of charity.<sup>1</sup> The Emperor had a lively faith in the holiness of the priest and invited him to the Crimea. There was, however, nothing mystical in the relations between the two, as there afterwards was between Nicholas II. and Philippe. At one of the railway stations the passengers left the train for their midday repast when a curious ceremony attracted my attention. John of Cronstadt, who occupied the head of the table and was surrounded by God-fearing ladies, took his dish of soup, blessed it, raised a spoonful to his lips, partook of it as though it were the communion, and handed the dish on to his neighbour. She reverently crossed herself, absorbed a

<sup>1</sup> My friend Leskoff entertained the deepest contempt for John of Cronstadt and read me a tremendous attack on him wrapped up in literary form. Part of it appeared later in the *Messenger of Europe*.

spoonful, and passed on the vessel. When it came to a certain Crimean landowner who was a good acquaintance of mine,<sup>1</sup> he took the plate and handed it to a fellow-passenger, but without tasting the contents. At this there was a loud murmur of indignation.

A day or two later Father John delivered a sermon in Yalta to a great multitude, of which I was a unit. He said, "The Tsar is necessary to Russia, to Europe, to the world. He is the peacemaker of the human race. Therefore fear not that he will die. It is God's will that he should live. Be of good heart." After this the monarch lived ten days or a fortnight. I next heard the wonder-worker preach after the Emperor's death, also in the open air, and this is what he said: "God has called his illustrious servant away because you lacked faith. Had you believed that he would live when I announced it, your great Emperor would have been living and working among you to-day. Ye are people of little faith." As a matter of fact, the bulk of the people, moved though they undoubtedly were by the passing away of their semi-mythical chief, who had led as lonely a life as that of Deioces the Mede, regarded the event with curiosity as to its political consequences rather than with genuine grief.

A short time before his death, the Princess Alix of Hesse, who was about to wed his son, arrived in Yalta. The exact date of her disembarkment may not have been known in advance, it certainly was not prepared for. Taken somewhat by surprise, and unprovided with ladies to wait on the princess, the court officials had the choice of various expedients by which to extricate themselves from the difficulty. It is characteristic of the a-morality of thought, unrelieved even by a workaday sense of propriety, that of all issues open to them they chose or rather invented the worst. In a fit of coarse humour, which to many may seem to epitomise the court, the country, and the decadent epoch, Prince Y. went out into the city and invited young ladies of Mrs. Warren's profession to come to the palace and wait

<sup>1</sup> His name, Blaraberg, is well known throughout Russia for he was also a musical composer.

upon the future empress until ordinary tirewomen could relieve them of their unwonted duties. And it was these courtesans who received, dressed, and waited upon the lady who was afterwards to exercise such a blighting influence upon the nation into which she was about to be adopted. I saw two of these improvised maids enjoying the court sweets they had received from Prince Y. and his friends and criticising the palace arrangements. Years after—in the spring of 1913—meeting the prince at lunch in Petersburg, I reminded him of these extravagant freaks of his unregenerate days, but he still took pleasure in the recollection and asked me questions to freshen his memory.

Altogether, the beginnings of the public career of the imperial couple were marked with what superstitious Russians term sinister omens, like those of Richard II. of England, Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette of France, and they were bruited abroad freely and interpreted by young and old from Riga to Astrakhan.

At the outset of his reign the young Tsar, who was believed by some of those who knew him best to be wholly wanting in that fellow-feeling for others which the Buddha makes the groundwork of all morality, gave a striking proof of his inaccessibility to human sorrow. Among the festivities that marked his coronation was a popular fête in which a Muscovite custom of olden days was partly revived. Food and sweets, a pocket handkerchief and an enamelled goblet with the imperial arms were offered by the monarchs to all their subjects who should come at the time fixed. Merry-go-rounds, theatres, booths, various entertainments, and bands were provided on a generous scale. Hundreds of thousands of peasants, artisans, and mendicants from near and far flocked to the ancient capital to enjoy the national holiday. By nightfall on the eve the approaches were blocked to the vast field of Khodynka—the scene chosen by the authorities—and for miles the pressure of the throng was tremendous. In singing, shouting, jesting, and horseplay the cool May night was spent. At first waggon after waggon laden with food passed through the dense gathering, provoking screams,

yells, and hurrahs, the people surging and jostling each other in order to make way; now and again a Cossack or a gendarme came dashing along on horseback frightening, maiming, or killing some of the weary watchers, for the crowd grew denser and more compact as night wore into morning. By sunrise the pressure at the entrances was become formidable, but the gendarmes and Cossacks contrived to keep back the people until the early afternoon when the imperial couple took their places on the stand. The military band struck up the National Anthem and selections from the well-known opera, *Life for the Tsar*. While half a million voices acclaimed the young autocrat of Holy Russia and his consort the police threw open the entrances which were arranged to admit at the turnstiles one person after another. But the swaying and surging human sea swept away some of the barriers and burst into the enclosure, wave dashing against wave, breaking into bloody froth and foam, amid soul-searing shrieks, agonising cries, and the joyous strains of the military music. Soon the ground was strewn with several thousand mangled corpses. A battlefield it seemed to the elder officers, a pandemonium to the masses. The number of persons killed, crushed, trampled, smothered, never accurately ascertained, was variously estimated at three, five, seven thousand.<sup>1</sup> I was requested by the censor either to abstain from commenting on the "deplorable incident" or else to paraphrase the official account without additions. I did neither.

The Tsar was severely blamed in secret for allowing the festivities to continue in face of this disaster. But he seemed incapable of realising the depth and force of public opinion otherwise than by notional assent. Anyhow, the next day<sup>2</sup> he entertained 432 guests to dinner, and the day after the Grand Duke Sergius gave a gorgeous entertainment, which was followed on the 21st by the ball of the nobles and then by a dinner offered by the British ambassador, and so on

<sup>1</sup> The number has never been correctly announced. I was told at the time by the Moscow authorities—I was present at all the festivities—that it was a little over four thousand.

<sup>2</sup> 19th May.

till the end of the programme. It is affirmed, on good authority, that when the review took place, exactly a week after this terrible mishap and on the same field, and the "quality" foregathered for pigeon shooting, royalties, grand dukes, princes native and foreign, luminaries of diplomacy, and gallant warriors who had come to amuse themselves were pained and angered to note that the dead were still lying side by side along the barricades or were being carted away to improvised graves, and the odour emitted by the corpses could hardly be supported. As for the inarticulate masses, they went their own way, drawing from their stores of superstitious lore the standards by which to interpret these untoward occurrences. The heavy loss of human life they construed as an evil omen presaging a terrible end to a reign that had such a sinister beginning, and the shooting of the pigeons a week later imparted to what after all might have been but a mere accident the character of a deliberately malignant crime. For few Russians have the heart and fewer still the sacrilegious daring to harm pigeons, many regarding them as sacred birds, while some have a vague belief that they are the souls of erring Christians. On this very occasion I heard two *mooshiks* and their women folk debate the whole subject with animation and pathos on lines recognised by the bulk of the nation, and one of them closed the discussion with this sweeping dictum: "Say what you like, those heathen devils slew their bodies last week and are trying to kill their souls to-day. The devils!"

To the diplomatic representative of one of the great powers the Tsar in the course of conversation mentioned the matter casually, but with an expression of regret, whereupon the ambassador, assuming that Nicholas II. was deeply moved by the disaster and might be tranquillised by historical comparisons, assured his imperial interlocutor that accidents of this painful nature are almost unavoidable at such national festivities especially if popular enthusiasm and loyalty are exceptionally fervid and run wild. "It was just the same," he blandly remarked, "during the festivities that accompanied the crowning of Louis XVI. Your Majesty

may remember the details. And as you know, the *contretemps* was soon forgotten. The population idolised the young monarch, their joy was excessive, and in manifesting it a number of loyal people lost their lives. No importance attaches to such happenings. They are cloudlets that vanish almost before they are perceived. Who to-day even among historians dwells for a moment on that regrettable accident? Altogether there is a great resemblance between the opening days of Louis' reign and those of Nicholas II. In fact, . . ." but Nicholas II. cut him short.

In the salons of the day, particularly in that of the accomplished Countess Levashoff, the solace offered by this Job's comforter was as much the subject of caustic comment as the shortsightedness of the authorities who were responsible for the accident that had elicited it. The countess, who knew the youthful Tsar intimately and saw him at close quarters during those strenuous days when amusement was become an irksome task, told me at the time that so far as she could judge he was more concerned about the effect which the narrative would have upon others than about the misery caused to the families of his ill-starred subjects.

The reign of Nicholas II. is largely the resultant of the clashing of two forces: one which had its origin in the new spirit of the age and was to some extent represented by Witte, who stood for steady progress of every kind compatible with the political system; and the other emanating from the historic past and personified by the men behind the Tsar, whose paltry expedients generally proceeded from bottomless ignorance and were often divorced from judgment and patriotism. Witte was a commanding spirit who made himself for a time—

"what Nature destined him,

The pause, the central point of thousand thousands."

He fascinated those who knew him intimately, and he fascinated them by his typically Russian qualities and defects, the fellow-feeling, the ready pity for suffering, the humane equalising touch, the union of contrasts, the suddenness with which his moods, and sometimes even his opinions, alter—



nated, touching one extreme at this moment and its opposite at the next. But he attracted and commanded still more through the medium of judgment by his lucidity of vision, by his capacity of surveying a subject all round, not only in the smallest details of its internal properties, but also in its external bearings. Above all he impressed those who had to do with him by a permanent substratum of tendency amid all the changes, by the existence of certain fixed points, by currents set in one and the same direction. He could be relied upon within certain definable limits. For instance, his striving to safeguard peace was a factor that never changed. This limited constancy is a trait he may have inherited from his Dutch ancestors.

Witte long had the feeling that the social and political molecules of which the Tsardom was composed, and which were ever forming and re-forming themselves into fleeting shapes, might be attracted and held permanently together by the central force of a grandiose economic transformation and the interests which that would create and foster, seconded by educational influences properly systematised. The resolution taken early in his ministerial career to effect this transfiguration offers a clue to his policy. He was one of the few originating statesmen ever possessed by Russia, and since Peter's day he was unquestionably the greatest.

From the first he was disliked by the shy, secretive, polished young man who, having inherited together with the Empire the administration appointed by his father, was willing to follow his mother's advice and retain it. But Nicholas II. could not for long hit it off with Witte, who when they disagreed upon really momentous issues was as unyielding as the granite. The minister's defects, it must be admitted, were exactly of the kind that must chafe and ruffle a man like the Tsar. When discussing a question that moved him, for example, the minister would sometimes allow emphasis to degenerate into vehemence, reinforce his arguments with resonant blows of his fist on the table, and raise his voice till it could be heard in the adjoining room—tactics that a man of the Emperor's temperament could not brook.

While it would be a gross exaggeration to saddle Nicholas II. with the sole responsibility for the dissolution of the regime and the ruin of Russia, it is fair to say that no man contributed so materially to bring them about as this shallow, weak-willed, shifty creature. It was impossible to trust him either to redeem his word, to stand by the minister who acted on it, or even to refrain from intriguing against his own responsible agents for the purpose of undoing the work which he and they had undertaken and achieved conjointly. In affairs of State, as in private life, faithlessness was the trait that vitiated his best actions and aggravated his worst. As the crowned head of a parliamentary state like Belgium or Italy, Nicholas II. might have had his defects neutralised. But alone to preside over the destinies of a mighty Empire was impossible without revealing the fact that he was among the least fitted men in his dominions. What made matters worse was his complete unconsciousness of his unfitness. That it was which engendered the danger that always hung over Russia at home and over Russia's peaceful neighbours abroad. Deep-rooted faith in his own ability, which increased immeasurably towards the close of his reign, prompted him to shun the very few men whose statesmanship might have shielded his people from the worst consequences of his faults and moved him to choose officials, or rank outsiders whose only qualification was their willingness to serve as passive tools in his unsteady hands. Consequently his selection of ministers and of favourites—for he employed them both—was deplorable.

And yet in spite of the scandalous way in which the country was misruled, Nicholas II. long escaped the harsh criticisms of which his father from the outset of his reign had been the butt. During the first ten years of his life a most flattering portrait of him was current in the non-Russian world. He was depicted as a prince of peace, a Slav Messiah sent for the salvation, not of his own people only, but of the whole human race. Passionate love of humanity and selfless devotion to the good and the true were among the qualities universally predicated of him. And so deep

rooted was this conviction throughout Europe and America that when I published my portrait of the Tsar in the *Quarterly Review*<sup>1</sup>—for which a Russian official of rank privately accepted responsibility in order to safeguard an eminent statesman and myself—it provoked an outburst of righteous wrath among respectable people of all classes of the population of Britain, but more especially among nationalists and conservatives there. It was set down as a gross caricature, untruthful, and politically mischievous.

When he ascended the throne Nicholas II. was still his mother's darling, passivity his predominant mental feature, and diffidence one of its transient symptoms. That phase of his career, however, was brief and the change from the chrysalis to the butterfly rapid. At the first audience he accorded the Council of the Empire, which met to do him homage, he exhibited his early manner. The assembly was composed of venerable dignitaries of the Empire, their bodies embellished with gorgeous uniforms and their faces wreathed in courtly smiles. They were eager to behold the imperial majesty that hedgeth kings encircling him whose father and grandfather many of them had served. What they actually observed was childish constraint, a shambling gait, a furtive glance, and spasmodic movements. An undersized, pithless lad sidled into the apartment in which these hoary dignitaries were respectfully awaiting him. With downcast eyes and in a shrill falsetto voice he hastily blurted out a single sentence, "Gentlemen, in the name of my late father I thank you for your services," hesitated for a second, and then turning on his heels was gone. They looked at each other, some in amazement, many uttering a mental prayer for the weal of the country; and after an awkward pause, dispersed to their homes.

The nation's next vicarious meeting with the Tsar took place a few days later upon an occasion as solemn as the first; but in the interval he had been hypnotised by M. Pobiedonostseff, the lay-bishop of autocracy, who had the secret of spiritually anointing and intellectually equipping the chosen of the Lord. The keynote of the Emperor's

<sup>1</sup> July, 1904. I continued the article in the *National Review*.

second appearance was haughtiness, the nearest approach he could make to dignity. All Russia had then gathered together in the persons of the representatives of the zemstvos—we may call them embryonic county councils—to do homage to his Majesty on his accession to the throne. Loyal addresses without number, some drawn up in the flowery language of oriental obsequiousness, others plain spoken and ominous, had been presented from all those institutions. One of these documents—and only one—had seemed to M. Pobiedonostseff to smack of liberalism. No less loyal in form or spirit than those of the other boards, the address drawn up by the council of Tver vaguely expressed the modest hope that his Majesty's confidence might not be wholly restricted to the bureaucracy, but would likewise be extended to the Russian people and to the zemstvos, whose devotion to the throne was proverbial. This was a reasonable wish; it could not seriously be dubbed a crime; and even if it bespoke a certain spirit of mild independence, it was after all the act of a single zemstvo, whereas the men who had come to do homage to the Emperor were the spokesmen, not of one zemstvo, but of all Russia. Yet the autocrat strutted pompously into the brilliantly lighted hall, and with knitted brows and tightly drawn lips turned wrathfully upon the chosen men of the nation, and stamping his little foot ordered them to put away such chimerical notions which he would never entertain.

Between those two public appearances of Nicholas II. lay that short period of suggestion during which the impressionable youth had been made not so much to believe as to feel that he was God's lieutenant, the earthly counterpart of his divine master. From that time forward he was filled with a spirit of self-exaltation which went on gaining strength in accordance with the psychological law that pride usurps as much space as servility is ready to yield. Nikolai Alexandrovitch soon began to look upon himself as the centre of the world, the peacemaker of mankind, the torch-bearer of civilisation among the "yellow" and other "barbarous" races, and the dispenser of almost every blessing to his own happy people. Taking seriously this his imaginary mission,

he meddled continuously and directly in many affairs of State, domestic and foreign, unwittingly thwarting the course of justice, undermining legality, impoverishing his subjects, boasting his fervent love of peace and plunging his tax-burdened people into the horrors of sanguinary and needless wars.

The dowager empress kept her imperial son in leading strings for a considerable time after the death of her consort and seconded the efforts of Pobiedonostseff to impress upon him the necessity of following in the footsteps of his "never-to-be-forgotten father." That phrase often and piously reiterated came to possess a sacramental virtue which he could not resist, and it is a pathological fact that he strove earnestly to copy Alexander III. until at last he believed he had succeeded. In truth the two men were as far asunder in moral character as in physique. Alexander, sincere, gloomy, mistrustful, and narrow-minded, felt his limitations and never ventured out beyond his depth. And he endeavoured honestly to secure the services of the best men among those who entered his narrow circle of acquaintances. Moreover, when he had chosen an adviser, he stuck to him, asked his advice, and never rejected it without good reason. Lastly, anything that smacked of perfidy, of disloyalty, of guile, was an abomination in his sight and he never forgave the guilty one. His word was better than a bond. And yet it is a curious characteristic of the country and the people that even he with his uprightness and probity violated the covenant of his house with Finland and broke his own promise in regard to Batoum. But Nicholas II. was the opposite to his father. Unsteady, self-complacent, callous, fickle, and polished, he changed his favourites and his principles with his fitful moods, lacked moral courage, intrigued against his chosen counsellors, mistook his own interests for those of the nation, and imagined himself the autocrat of a hundred and eighty millions.

In the year 1904 I was struck with his predilection for adventurers of the Cagliostro type, and I expressed regret that he should allow "a band of casual, obscure, and dangerous men to usurp the functions of his responsible ministers whose

recommendations are ignored and whose warnings are disregarded. . . . Every candidate for imperial favour whom the grand dukes present is a specialist who promises to realise the momentary desires of the Tsar. Thus M. Philippe, the spiritualist who appeared during the Emperor's illness in Yalta, promised him a son and heir and was therefore received with open arms. As time passed and the hopes which the adventurer raised were not fulfilled, the canonisation of St. Seraphim was suggested by a pious grand duke and a sceptical abbot because among the feats said to have been achieved by this holy man was the miraculous bestowal of children upon barren women." <sup>1</sup>

After the assassination of his second favourite, Sipyaghin, his choice fell upon Plehve for the post of Minister of the Interior. Plehve was the official whose self-possession on the assassination of Alexander II. had strongly impressed all who witnessed it. This man, probably the cleverest of all who were within the Emperor's reach, became virtual dictator of the Empire and one of the most efficient instruments of fate for pushing the autocracy into the abyss. Well-informed, conversant with the seamy side of human nature, cool-headed, and calculating, Plehve knew how to touch the right chords of sentiment, prejudice, or passion when moving large bodies of men, and could keep his head in the most alarming crisis. He was one of those successful bureaucrats whom it would be impossible to classify by nationality, genealogy, church, or even party. Of obscure parentage, of German blood with a Jewish strain, of uncertain religious denomination, his ethical worth had been weighed and found wanting by his own easy-going colleagues long before.

Soon after he had entered on the duties of his new office, a number of peasants of the Ukraine provinces of Kharkoff and Poltava showed signs of discontent with their miserable condition. Although spontaneous and local, the outburst was dealt with severely and the peasants flogged by the provincial authorities without instructions from the capital. Plehve visited the disaffected places, promptly rewarded

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Review*, July, 1904.

the Governor of Kharkoff for having the malcontents flogged at once,<sup>1</sup> and punished the Governor of Poltava for having them flogged only as an afterthought. The minister soon became the most powerful official in the Empire, a sort of grand vizier whose power was unlimited, but was held at the pleasure of an absolute and changeful master. He applied in the spirit of German method the principles propounded by Pobiedonostseff, and among the concrete results were pogroms of the Jews, the spoliation of Armenians, the persecution of Poles and Ruthenians, the exile of liberal-minded nobles, the flogging of peasants, the reorganisation of espionage with the notorious Azeff as its moving spirit.

These and other men turned the Tsar's head by their endless panegyrics. They invented for him a lofty mission and feigned to admire the masterly way in which he was fulfilling it. Being the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, and therefore a Christian, he could not be deified without blasphemy, but between humanity and divinity he became a *tertium quid*. And they venerated him accordingly, anticipating his wishes, and colouring facts to suit his fancies, for while he could appreciate effects his faculty of discerning their relations to causes was almost atrophied. He operated with phantoms, fought against windmills, conversed with saints, and consulted the dead. He employed the vast power of which he was the repository to grind down over a hundred million men at home in order to obtain the means of killing or wounding hundreds of thousands abroad. Of the psychology of foreign nations and of his own he lacked rudimentary knowledge, and international politics was a region of darkness in which he groped his way to ruin. When Witte and two other ministers besought him to redeem his pledge, evacuate Manchuria and save the land from the horrors of war, he returned this answer: "I will keep peace and my own counsel as well." To one of the grand dukes who, on the day before the rupture with Japan, hinted at the possibility of war, the Emperor said: "Leave that to me. Japan will never fight. My reign will be an era of peace throughout."

<sup>1</sup> Prince Obolensky, the governor, received a star from the Emperor for his energy. Some of the peasants he had flogged are said to have died in consequence of their punishment.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE RULE OF NICHOLAS II.

THERE never was a trustworthy intermediary between the isolated sovereign and his restive people. Many individuals there were whom he received and questioned from time to time, some of whom spoke with a directness, sincerity, and knowledge worthy of an ancient Hebrew prophet, but the message they delivered was not only resented and disregarded by the Tsar, but was also contradicted and neutralised by equally impressive statements volunteered by interested politicians or misinformed patriots. And Nicholas II., even if he had felt the desire, lacked the means of sifting the true from the false. The upshot was a gulf between the autocracy and the people nearly as broad and deep as that which sundered the Dalai Lama from his pious worshippers. An anecdote which, devoid of foundation in fact, is superlatively true as a presentment of the paralysis of volition from which he suffered, was current long before I ventured upon sketching his portrait in the *Quarterly* and *National Reviews*.

One day, the story ran, a nobleman of great experience and progressive tendencies was received in audience by the Tsar. He made the most of his opportunity, and laid before his sovereign the wretched state of the peasantry, the general unrest it was occasioning, and the urgent necessity of removing its proximate causes by modifying the political machinery of government. During this unwelcome *exposé* the Emperor, whose urbanity and polish left nothing to be desired, nodded from time to time approvingly and repeated often, "I know. Yes, yes. You are right. Quite right." The nobleman when retiring felt morally certain that the monarch was at one with him on the subject. Immediately afterwards a great landowner, also a member of the nobility, was ushered in, who unfolded a very different tale. According to this authority things on the whole were progressing satisfactorily, the only drawback being the weakness and indul-



gence of the authorities. "What is needed, sire, is an iron hand. The peasants must be kept in their place by force, otherwise they will usurp ours. To make way for them and treat them as though they were the masters of the country is a crime." During this discourse also Nicholas II. was attentive and appreciative, nodding and uttering the stereotyped phrases, "Yes, I know. You are right. Quite right." And the conservative, like the liberal, departed happy.

Then a side door opened and the empress entered looking grave. "You really must not go on like this, Niki," she exclaimed. "It is not dignified. Remember you are an autocrat who should possess a will strong enough to stiffen a nation of a hundred and fifty millions." "But what is it that you find fault with, darling?" "Your want of resolution and of courage to express it. I have been listening to the conversations you have just had. Count X. whom you first received pleaded the cause of the disaffected. You assented to everything he advanced, telling him he was right, quite right. Then M. Y. was introduced who gave you an account of things as they really are, and you agreed with him in just the same way, saying, 'You are right. Quite right.' Well now, that attitude does not befit an autocrat. You must learn to have a will of your own and assert it." "You are right, dear, quite right," was the answer.

Friends and acquaintances of mine, men of various walks in life and divergent ways of thought, who had an opportunity of observing him, all missed in his nature diffusive sympathy with the sorrows and joys of men and women and the faculty of concentrating his intellect or his will on any object but that towards which his whole being was orientated. "I informed him of the lamentable state of the district," one of them said to me, "and drew a harrowing picture of men and women steeped in misery, racked with pain, but he only answered, 'Yes, I know, I know,' and bowed me out." Those words, "Yes, I know, I know," have figured as the *finis* uttered by the Tsar at the close of History's Chapters on the Finnish Constitution, the Armenian Church and schools, the nationality of the Poles,

the Liberty of Conscience denied to his own people. "I know, I know!" If only he had realised what he claimed to know he might still be on the throne. Men, like trees, fall on their leaning side, and in the Tsar's case the leaning side was not an inclination to assuage human suffering, otherwise there would have been less misery during the great famine and far less bloodshed during his ill-starred reign. The unaffectedly heartless way in which he spoke of the awful catastrophe during his coronation, of the agonies of his people at the time of the famine and during the Manchurian campaign, and of the abortive revolution that followed it, seemed to indicate that he is deficient in the sensibility which characterises the average human being. A certain polish of kindness marked his casual intercourse with people, but it is to be feared that it resembled the glitter of the gilt cross on the mouldering coffin.

And yet in his family relations he displayed qualities that would have done credit to any private citizen. He was an uncommonly dutiful son who interpreted filial respect as generously as the followers of Confucius, having in the early days of his reign frequently submitted not his will only but also his judgment to that of his august mother. A model husband, he left little undone to ensure the happiness of his imperial consort. A tender father, he literally adored his children with almost maternal fervour, and often magnanimously deprived himself of the keen pleasure which the discharge of the clerical duties of kingship confers in order to watch over his darling little grand duke and grand duchesses and to see that sunshine brightened their lives. What, for instance, could be more touching than the picture—which courtiers used to draw—of the dread autocrat of all the Russias anxiously superintending the details of the bathing of his little son, the Grand Duke Alexis, at the height of the diplomatic storm raised by the North Sea incident? What could be more idyllic than the pretty human weakness betokened by the joyful exclamation with which the great potentate suddenly interrupted Admiral Roshdjestvensky, who was making a report on the Baltic Squadron, "But are

you aware that he weighs 14 lb.?" "Who, your Majesty?" asked the admiral, his mind still entangled in questions of displacement, quick-firing guns, and other kindred matters. "The heir to the throne," answered the happy father. Touches of nature like this offer a refreshing contrast to the Byzantine stiffness of the autocrat bending over his table and writing marginal glosses.

Nicholas II. was a man of destiny in the fullest sense of the word. Few monarchs known to history did more to transform the entire structure, political and economic, of society than he by pushing the conceptions underlying Tsarism to their extreme consequences. This, it must be added, was due largely to the circumstance that the reactions provoked by his qualities and defects among the revolutionists harmonised admirably with the diseased condition of the body politic. All the new solvent ideas fell upon grateful soil. His weakness of will contrasted painfully with his craving for strength and his endeavours to feign its attainment. Incapable of perseverance in personal conduct or of system in public policy, he was uncommonly obstinate in little things. Gradually, too, he lost much of the power of voluntary attention in which at the outset he had been nowise deficient. "Emotions which move the normal man profoundly touch him but lightly, and for a brief while, so that fitfulness is his substitute for steadiness, impulse for will, mood for strength of character. He thinks with the ideas of others, acts at their instigation or else by impulse, and likes them less for their qualities than for their manifest disposition towards himself. It is not an exaggeration, therefore, to affirm that he is constant only in his inconstancy." Thus I wrote of him as long ago as May, 1905. "That ailment was aggravated by injudicious but well-meant efforts to cure it. A soft feminine voice, uttering loving words and bracing exhortations in the language of Shakespeare, stimulated him to endeavours which took a wrong direction. Had he possessed average intelligence even a Russian Agnes Sorel might, perhaps, have helped him to co-ordinate the scattered elements of volition and get him credit for political wisdom; without it

a Deianira could but operate with that Fate which she fondly fancies she is out-manceuvring.”<sup>1</sup>

Like so many statesmen of the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, Nicholas II. appeared to be cause-blind. He failed to realise the nature of the nexus between cause and effect. The law of causality entering his mind was seemingly always refracted like a sunbeam striking the surface of the water. It changed its direction. It was in consequence of that defect that, while moving every lever to produce war, he was purblind to the approach of the conflict and deaf to the warnings of those who could see. The dispute with Japan was originally caused by his personal act of seizing his neighbour's property and believing he could placate the despoiled people by crying, “No offence intended!” Well-meaning at bottom, but logic-proof and mystical, he instinctively followed the example of the vampire which fans its victims while sucking their life blood. Under his predecessors Russia had grown and “thriven” in this way, and why should she not continue to grow in like manner under him? It was the old spirit of the predatory Tsarist State revived and embodied for the last time. So overweening was his confidence in his own prophetic vision that he was impervious to the arguments of the wisest of his responsible advisers, and risked the welfare of his subjects on the slender chance of his being a Moses to his people. And he resisted his ministers, not with the harmless swagger of a vainglorious youth, but with the calm settled presumption which medical psychologists describe as incurable. Like those Chinese Boxers who, believing their lives were charmed, smilingly stood up to the bullets of the Europeans, so Nicholas II. cheerfully exposed, not himself or his imperial house, but his people to a disaster which his second sight assured him could never come. For he started with a curious view of the autocracy. He firmly held that according to God's will he, the unique absolute ruler of modern times, should be at once the arbiter of peace and war throughout the globe and the keeper of the lives, the property, and the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *National Review*, May, 1905.

souls of his people at home. And he acted up to this belief, which marked an advance on that of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great. Thus he took it for granted that as no foreign power would dare to attack Russia, peace depended on whether he would attack any foreign power. And as he was resolved not to declare war, he reasoned that peace was therefore secure during his lifetime. One difference between him and the Boxer is, that the Boxer risked only his own life, whereas Nicholas II. risked and lost those of hundreds of thousands of his people. And even a capable autocrat, were he never so wise, ought not to be invested with such tremendous power. The chasms between Russia and progress, between the peasantry and well-being, between the Empire and peace he never bridged nor attempted to bridge, but contented himself with a pious hope, a shadowy velleity, a vague irrational impulse. At bottom, however, the conception of the State entertained by Nicholas II. was the logical development of that of the founders of the Tsardom.

Over against him stood Witte, who was for long the power that bent every force, public and private, to collective ends and overthrew every obstacle in his way. He humoured the Tsar and his family only in secondary matters, and not always in these, but his manner, which he was incapable of adjusting to court exigencies, was resented by the Emperor and loathed by his consort. One of the characteristics of the imperial lady was a fatal predisposition to assimilate and exaggerate the likes and dislikes of the person she loved and to push them to extreme and sometimes perilous consequences. It was in virtue of this bias that she grew more orthodox than the Metropolitan Archbishop and more autocratic than her husband. To her religion was policy and autocracy was religion. She could not bear to miss the outward pomp and circumstance of either, and Witte's presence was comparable to that of the skeleton at the banquet.

For a long time the Emperor was assisted in the government by what I termed at the time a "boudoir council" consisting of his imperial consort, a number of grand dukes, a spiritist or two, and the favourite man of the moment.

Under Alexander III. the other members of the imperial family had been kept in their places. Nicholas II. allowed them a wide scope of activity, political, military, and commercial. Colouring their plans in the hues of his own dreams, presenting him with motives that appealed to his prejudices, they exerted an influence over him that was pernicious. Nor, until the disappearance of the minister Plehve, which created a void around him, did they ever seriously exert themselves to change his suicidal course. The Grand Duke Sergius, the governor-general of Moscow,<sup>1</sup> who was for a long while the Tsar's expert on religious matters, once proposed to abolish the Juridical Society of Moscow for its liberal tendencies, and when it was objected that its members were scrupulously observant of the laws, he answered, "That's exactly my point—they are for that very reason all the more dangerous to the State."

When Russia's unique statesman was dismissed, the Tsar hearkened to the soft voice from the boudoir. "Show them that you are a real monarch whose word is law. You have issued your commands, now see that they are executed. They taunt you with a weak will. Let them feel its force!" And Nicholas responded to the stimulus. For if he lacked the sensitive conscience which wakes the sinner up, he possessed certain of the virtues which lull to sleep, and foremost among them that languid sweetness which enables a husband to spend his life as though it were an endless honeymoon. And it is possibly to the qualities underlying this soft passivity—which the son of Priam combined with personal dash—that Nicholas owed his predilection for the society of women, priests, charlatans, and children, and his shyness of the society of strong honest men. Whenever these conflicting influences clashed, the results were unedifying.

One day a strike of students, professors, and public-school boys was declared against the prevalent educational system. The dowager empress on learning what had happened

<sup>1</sup>I was first introduced to him by Princess (Lison) Trubetskoy, the friend of Gambetta. He offered me a high Russian order for the services I was supposed to have rendered to Orthodoxy as personified by the Metropolitan Archbishop. That was in the days of Alexander III.

counselled forbearance. But the boudoir council decided to have recourse to coercion. The minister sounded the rectors and deans, who told him that force would only do harm. But the inspiring voices insisted, "Show them that you are a real monarch. People say you have no will. Let them feel its force. . . . Have you forgotten your motto, 'Are you anvil? Be enduring. Are you hammer? Smite with might'?" Then the autocrat bade his ministers use sternness and repression. "Expel the rebellious students; dismiss the mutinous professors; close the high schools; stop the salaries." And the behest was executed. Witte, as President of the Committee of Ministers, then recorded his opinion in writing to the effect that, as force is no argument, the authorities should be chary of using it. If the proposed measures were carried out, all Russia would be moved to its depths. Let the government, therefore, publicly sanction and adopt the professors' views. The advice was frank, forcible, timely. The Tsar read it and bridled up at the very first words. "It is a piece of bare-faced impudence," he exclaimed, "to commit such views to paper." And before the angry flash had gone from his cheeks, he had the whole question transferred from the competence of the Committee of Ministers over which Witte presided to the Council of the Ministers of which he made Count Solsky vice-president under himself. Events, however, showed that the minister was right and the boudoir council wrong. The students finally scored a brilliant victory and the monarch suffered an ignominious defeat.

In February, 1905, an unprecedented thing took place. The nation, expecting a ukase to supplement and enlarge that of the preceding December which had disillusioned all classes, was astonished to read a manifesto which ran counter to their anticipations and announced the vigorous continuation of the war. The ministers were indignant. Witte told me that morning that he could not believe it was the work of the Tsar, and before we separated I learned that it had been inspired by the Tsaritsa and drafted by Prince Putyatin and Shirinsky-Shikhmatoff—in a word, it was

a pronouncement of the boudoir cabinet which the Emperor had been prevailed upon to sign.

According to the fundamental laws of the Empire, never departed from since the eighteenth century, no imperial manifesto could be promulgated without the foreknowledge of the Senate. But this document was sent late at night to the official journal, the editor of which refused to publish it because it had not been laid before the Senate. He was bidden, however, to swallow his scruples and publish the manifesto. A few days later he was publicly reprimanded and privately thanked for having disobeyed the law.

The manifesto made short work of the Russian peoples' hopes at home and abroad. It announced that the principal war-aim of the Emperor was control of the Pacific, and it identified the liberty-loving people with the "evil-minded ringleaders of the revolutionary movement." Witte could hardly restrain himself that morning. When explaining to me the heinousness of the act he shouted and struck the table, vowed that he would vindicate the law and either have that manifesto withdrawn or else himself withdraw from public life. He then hurried to the railway station together with the other members of the Council of Ministers and before they had reached Tsarskoye Selo he had laid a plan for the realisation of his object.<sup>1</sup> He succeeded in check-mating the Tsar and obtaining the rescript he wanted. The Emperor, who had worded it insidiously in the belief that the ministers would quarrel over it, but was disappointed through Witte's tactics, signed it most reluctantly. "Never in my life," one of them afterwards remarked, "even were I to live a century, shall I forget that remarkable scene. It burned itself in my memory; the sudden freezing of the features of the Tsar, the convulsive quivering of the lips, the sickly smile alternating with the frown, and then his last look when he handed back the paper, and, as our peasants put it, 'with his eyes showed his teeth.'"

Thenceforth, a representative assembly was the only solution to the State problems that had arisen. Witte had

<sup>1</sup> The story was related in detail in my article "The End of the Autocracy," *National Review*, May, 1905.



all along warned the Tsar frankly that unless certain concessions were made in time representative government would become a necessity; and that the representative principle, once officially recognised, the break up of the autocracy would follow as a matter of course. His advice was rejected, his prediction had come true, and on this occasion he deliberately voted for the representative principle. And when a colleague, in presence of the Tsar, remarked, "But, according to you, this move is incompatible with autocracy?" he answered, "Yes, I know it is, but it cannot be withheld any longer." What his Majesty thought on hearing these words was not recorded, but what he did will not soon be forgotten by those who witnessed it. That rescript, courtiers openly asserted, was the result of a ministerial revolt, a modern and humane substitute for a palace revolution. The Emperor presumably took this view, for he never convoked the council again.

That same Friday evening the document was printed and published and people who, having read the reactionary manifesto in the morning perused the liberal rescript in the evening, asked themselves whether the Empire was governed, like the Manichæan world, by a good principle and a bad. For it was now manifest that Nicholas II. was the nominal chief of two bodies moving in diametrically opposite directions: of the Council of Ministers in an outer chamber and of the boudoir council in an inner chamber; and that within the space of twenty-four hours he had first sanctioned the views of the one and then assented to the plans of the other. What was to be the outcome of it all?

From that moment onwards the autocrat struggled to free himself from the meshes of the net. Whether he felt humiliated by the successful strategy of his ministers, or was stimulated by the maxims of the boudoir council, is immaterial; important is the fact that he repented having signed the rescript and resolved to undo as far as possible what he had been constrained to do.

Thus the Emperor continually employed the governmental machine in such a way that the centrifugal tendencies

were fast snapping the links that kept class joined with class and nationality with nationality. The liberty-loving elements of the Tsardom were struck with the unsteadiness and irresolution of the government and the weakness of the State, and were heartened thereby to more vigorous efforts.

The Emperor's inability to govern might, perhaps, have passed unnoticed if he had allowed any man of intellect and will-power in his stead to grapple with the jarring elements. This, however, he refused to permit, while allotting to obscure soldiers and seamen, tricksters and money grabbers, an ever larger share of the supreme power to the detriment of the nation. The mental and moral impotency of this well-intentioned marplot, who cannot be said to have had even experience, despite ten years of uniform failure, became one of the commonplaces of conversation in town and country. Even the rough-and-ready droshky drivers said of him that he had been thrust among rulers like a pestle among spoons. Yet, apprised of his impotence by the boudoir council, he wished to will and act, and took velleity for the deed. No occurrence, no event, made a lasting impression on his mind. Abroad Russia's armies might be scattered, her ships sunk, her credit ruined; the Tsar was serene in spite of it all. At home the whole framework of society might be going to pieces, Nicholas sat still and fondly annotated State papers, a very Narcissus of the inkpot. In the Tsardom, whenever the political temperature grew too hot, the custom had for ages been to break the thermometer, not on any account to let in the cool air. And the Emperor kept to it religiously. The results now began to appear.

I wrote at the time, "The position is no longer endurable. The crisis can now end in one way only—in the disappearance of that system of absolutism the advantages of which I hoped—vainly hoped, alas!—to see rescued for the sake of the nation. At present the one question which to my thinking may still be profitably discussed is whether, while there is yet time, the autocrat will voluntarily dissociate the future of his dynasty from that of the autocracy. Will he cast his semi-divine privileges overboard in the storm to save his position in the Empire, and perhaps what he values even

more than his position? That is a matter which primarily, almost exclusively, concerns himself and his inspirers of the boudoir council, who still fancy that windmills may be turned with a hand-bellows. The other interested party, the nation, whose prisoner Nicholas II. may be truly said to be, has already chosen its route—the shortest road to the goal, and will travel along it resolutely. It is for those who advise and wish well to Nicholas to say whether he will desist from the policy of provocation now being pursued in his name. When the nation has been fully aroused it will be too late. And the time still left for reflection seems lamentably short.

“Argument and suasion have unhappily proved fruitless. To the one he is blind; he is deaf to the other. The belief is spreading that that is his misfortune, not his crime. Minister after minister warned him of the dangers fast gathering round him. “Yes, yes, I understand,” was the evasive reply: and the well-meant intimation left as little trace in heart or brain as a drop of rain water on the back of a duck. His nobles petitioned him, his zemstvos memorialised him, every class, every profession and element of the population, besought him to reform the administration and admit the people to a share in the government. For a moment he appeared to listen, and then turned away. Almost every nation on the globe adjured him to put an end to the unprecedented horrors of a wanton war. Again he seemed to pay attention, but he soon moved aside and talked of something else. For the whole world is wrong and Nicholas alone is right. The individual who goes up to the clouds in an air-filled balloon does not see himself ascending, but only his fellow-men sinking away into insignificance. This unnerved young man, completely shut off from the world and with hardly a peep-hole to look through, knows better what should and can be done there than the intellect of the people, the wisdom of the world. For he is buoyed up by the encouragement and admiration of the council of the boudoir. In his thirst for approval he dismissed several advisers and chose others; but the new ones repeated the warnings of their predecessors. He then appointed a council of ministers

in order to escape from the importunity of Witte, but his entire council as one man, not only offered him wholesome advice, but took care that he should adopt it. And now he convokes it no more. Who knows how far it might go? '*Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute.*' His own relatives, the political grand dukes, have abandoned him. They suddenly stopped short in their onward course, wheeled round, and bowing respectfully to the liberals made their profession of faith. His own mother talked with him, exhorted and implored him to see things as they are. Then she too finally ranged herself on the side of the moderate reformers. This distinguished lady is now in favour of representative government, strongly sides with those who desire peace, and materially helped to obtain at least one instalment of justice to the Finns. She also sympathises with the down-trodden tribes of the Caucasus and regrets the spoliation of the Church property of the Armenians. It was largely due to her influence that Count Vorontseff Dashkoff has been appointed viceroy there in succession to the madcap Prince Galitzin. In a word she has made motherly love quite compatible with plain speaking and a policy of common sense."<sup>1</sup>

Von Plehve's tenure of office was rich in amazing developments, for there is no gainsaying the statesmanlike quality of his intellect, his German a-morality, or his susceptibility to all sorts of new impressions. The way in which he strove to solve the awkward problems to which the labour movement was imparting actuality was truly Machiavellian, and the unerring discrimination that revealed to him the value of a human instrument like Father Gapon bespoke a fine *flair* and remarkable courage. But the conditions he found and had to accept as data hampered him considerably. Instinctively he felt that the State top must go on spinning to keep from falling, and he accordingly encouraged the Tsar in the policy of conquest that culminated in war with Japan. For Russia's whole ordering was adjusted to expansion by force. It was largely this and his passion for espionage that turned Witte against him and made them bitter enemies.

I well remember seeing him killed. I described the murder

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *National Review*, May, 1905, pp. 440 fol.

in the *Daily Telegraph*. On the historic day I was driving over the badly paved streets of Petersburg to the landing-place for steamers to meet a friend who was coming from Ireland to stay with me. My droshky was in the street leading to the Warsaw railway station when two men on bicycles glided past, followed by a closed carriage, which I recognised as that of the all-powerful minister. Suddenly the ground before me quivered, a tremendous sound as of thunder deafened me, the windows of the houses on both sides of the broad street rattled, and the glass of the panes was hurled on to the stone pavement. A dead horse, a pool of blood, fragments of a carriage, and a hole in the ground were parts of my rapid impressions. My driver was on his knees devoutly praying and saying that the end of the world had come. I got down from my seat and moved towards the hole, but a police officer ordered me back, and to my questions replied that the minister Plehve had been blown to fragments. The man who materially contributed to condemn him to death, and who had the sentence thus effectively carried out, was the favourite spy of the government and member of the Social Revolutionary Council, Azeff. In truth it was a mad world.

Plehve's end was received with semi-public rejoicings. I met nobody who regretted his assassination or condemned the authors. This attitude towards crime, although by no means new, struck me as one of the most sinister features of the situation, and I gave expression to my apprehension of its consequences.<sup>1</sup> Far more surprising was the attitude of the government towards its own agent, Azeff, who conceived and concerted the misdeed and saw it carried out. This monster was allowed to remain in the government service, and even after he had the Tsar's uncle, the Grand Duke Sergius, assassinated he was kept on, and his services were deemed to be invaluable and indispensable!

When Plehve had vanished, the Grand Duke Sergius

<sup>1</sup> In the *National Review*, May, 1905, p. 420, I wrote: "In that connivance at lawless violence lurks a danger the insidiousness of which few people realise. Personally I fear that unless its progress be speedily stayed it may lead to the moral paralysis of the nation." Those words were penned thirteen years ago.

steered the ship of State, standing harsh and defiant behind the professional man at the wheel. He had just flung in the face of the people the accusation which, though resented as a calumny, was, in a restricted sense, true enough of many of the revolutionists, that they had sold their Tsar for Japanese gold.<sup>1</sup> And a few weeks later Sergius, like Plehve, was ruthlessly, criminally cut down in the height of his triumphant activity, the nation again looking on without disapproval and the government continuing to fee the chief assassin.

These deaths, which made a deep impression upon all Russia, left the Tsar undisturbed. Living and working apart from the currents of the time, he seemed impermeable to deep impressions. But the disappearance of those two counsellors left him conspicuously alone. They had no successors to share with him the moral burden. Skilful flatterers he had many, but no helpful friend. From motives which it would be impertinent to analyse, the few he had had left him for the time on definitely forsook him. The grand dukes withdrew from the partnership once so lucrative, now grown so dangerous, taking elaborate precautions to advertise the fact, *urbi et orbi*. Some of them pointed to the sickly figure of the Tsar and all but cried, "*Ecce homo.*" Almost the first to go was the Grand Duke Vladimir, who after the massacre of Red Sunday defended himself in American and English journals. The responsibility for the shooting, he explained, was not his but that of Prince Vasilchikoff, who refused point-blank to obey the humane grand-ducal order to cease firing on the people, and refused with perfect impunity. Again, after the terrible death of Sergius, a London newspaper informed all whom it might concern of the political conversion of Vladimir, who "recognises that the worship of the idol of absolutism is a worse foe of the monarchy than anarchy itself."<sup>2</sup>

Next among the runaways from the sinking ship of autocracy was the ambitious Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovitch. This personage was the one nationalist member of the imperial family whose zeal burned for genuine Russian civilisation untouched by the contagion of Western culture.

<sup>1</sup> The grand duke added "and English gold." In this he was mistaken.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Times*, 23rd March, 1905.

He had just displayed his patriotic hatred of foreigners by organising a raid against their mercantile shipping, and showed his love of Russia by promoting the Yalu concession, which was to have enriched himself and weakened Japan. The political apostasy of this promising prince was perhaps the unkindest cut of all. For he owed many of the best things he possessed to the Tsar, while the Tsar was beholden to him only for some of the pernicious counsels he had received and of the evil counsellors he had trusted. Married to the sister of Nicholas II., the Grand Duke Alexander used and abused his great but precarious influence to recommend Bezobrazoff and Alexeyeff to his imperial brother-in-law who, caught in the lime of flattery, allowed these adventurers to ride rough-shod over Russia. He was the purveyor of political favourites to the monarch, one of whom was Admiral Alexeyeff.

This grand duke possessed the open sesame to his brother-in-law's affections and utilised it constantly. The Tsar was a frequent guest in Alexander's palace, where he would amuse himself for hours on end riding in a miniature train around one of the apartments. And in the intervals of this innocent fun shared by the children, he would assent to some important suggestion of the shrewd grand duke, who in this casual way managed to have a new ministry created for his behoof unknown to Witte, whom he hated undyingly. From the authorisation of the Yalu concession, Alexander Mikhailovitch expected to add millions to his annual income of 600,000 roubles. But after Plehve's death he became a liberal and bruited his conversion abroad. Russian newspapers were full of it, and even revolutionists were apprised of it. Happily he had a press organ of his own,<sup>1</sup> through which he pointed out to the world the fruits of his conversion.

Again, it was known that in his unregenerate days this illustrious personage hated the Jews as Saul of Tarsus had hated the Christians. But since the deaths of Plehve and Sergius he had his Damascus, and the scales having fallen from his eyes he found salvation. He was no longer a

<sup>1</sup> *Slovo*.

militant anti-Semite. God having presumably made the Jews, the grand duke was willing thenceforth to let them pass for men of an inferior race.

But by far the most noteworthy sign of the times was the departure of the dowager empress herself from the camp of the absolutists, if one may describe thus clumsily her mild assent to counsels prompted by common sense, and her gentle but persevering disapproval of measures which, besides harming the nation, endangered the dynasty. Whether solicitude for her son or pity for the people supplied the motive is a matter of indifference to outsiders; the step was well warranted by both. This distinguished lady, whose inborn tact and *savoir faire* often stood her instead of political foresight, now sorrowfully parted from her son and daughter-in-law at the first most critical moment in their lives. Such a step cannot have been taken with a light heart. Having journeyed together for more than a decade in the pursuit of a political will-o'-the-wisp, the elder of the two empresses, with experience to guide her, descried an abyss in front and cried, "Halt." And yet that was the road which she herself had so often exhorted her son never to swerve from! But her eyes had been opened; she had lost faith in the policy of putting spokes in the wheels of time. The beliefs on which the Tsardom reposed were crumbling away, and she then began to realise the fact. She felt that the institutions to which her son clung convulsively, as might a scared seaman to the heavy anchor of a sinking ship, would drag him down to the depths. And with the courage born of motherly love she warned him of the danger. But Cassandra's prophecies were not more vain or true. The siren's voice from the boudoir of the wife went straight to the husband's heart. Unhappily, the wife's exhortations were but the echoes of the son's neurotic visions. In her naïve dreams there was no place for prosaic fears, and her fond ambition was blind to obstacles and to consequences. It would be rash to criticise without knowing the order of considerations that moved the lady to turn a deaf ear to the voice of the dowager empress. But it is not easy to imagine any rational grounds on which her own



sister reasoning, advising, beseeching, should also have been put out of court without a hearing. The widowed Grand Duchess Sergius, whose vision long experience had sharpened, and whose motives had been chastened by severe suffering, sought over and over again to impress upon her crowned sister the fact that there are times when true conjugal affection is more effectually shown by judicious hindrance than by uncritical incentive.

Nicholas II., who rejected the promptings of reason, now began to be regarded by his people as the principal cause of their sufferings, the embodiment of a system that must at all costs be overthrown. Pobiedonostseff, without formally retiring, had done his work, and it remained only for history to label it. Witte, fretting and chafing against his forced inaction, gave a loose rein to his criticisms, ostentatiously connected his policy which had thus been baulked with widely operating economic laws and began to be identified with the aggressive desire of moderate liberals to work out the salvation of the country in spite of its crowned head. The dowager empress saw him occasionally and made praiseworthy attempts to bring her son and him together, but finally discovered that they were as fire and water. In one conversation she had with the statesman she admitted frankly that the aversion of the Emperor for his most eminent subject was invincible. Still his services were not wholly disdained. Whenever there was a very difficult or a dangerous task to be undertaken, Witte's name was invariably pronounced, and for his Tsar's and country's sake he was exhorted to undertake it. It was thus that he was chosen to carry on the negotiations with the Kaiser's government which ended in the hated Russo-German commercial treaty, to report on the needs of the peasants and recommend a series of reforms, and to repair to Portsmouth to conclude peace with the Japanese. Thus from time to time the two men worked together. For Witte, driven by boundless ambition, was generally ready to snatch at any chance of playing a prominent and useful part in the history of his country. When I pointed out to him—as I sometimes did—the difficulty I had to harmonise these acts of his with his

own words, he would return this answer, "You seem to forget that we live in Russia under an autocracy, and that I, who have so long been minister, cannot refuse any request made by the Tsar for my services, if I have reason to think that they would prove helpful to him or the country. The unwritten law, the traditions in which I have been brought up, and my conscience oblige me to respond to the call."

But Witte's counsel on political matters, although reinforced by events, was almost invariably rejected. The Tsar had other advisers who drew their political wisdom from the world of spirits, and to them he hearkened submissively. Two princesses whom I had known in their school-days, the French charlatan Philippe, and certain shadowy figures that flitted across one's field of vision, most of them to sink in oblivion immediately afterwards, were the intermediaries between the Supreme Being and his vicar on earth. For the grim realities around him he had no eyes. He ignored even the secret council held in Paris some months before<sup>1</sup> in which it was decided to unite a number of powerful Russian organisations and to get them to bring pressure to bear jointly on himself,<sup>2</sup> and to make the most of the indignation aroused in the land by the conduct of the Manchurian campaign and the cruelties committed by the authorities in dealing with the revolutionists. Congruously with this secret plan professional congresses were being held everywhere, a medical congress, a lawyers' congress, a congress of engineers, a teachers' congress, a peasants' congress, a postal congress, and, most important of all, a congress of railway men. These organisations represented to my thinking the forces that would eventually transform the political and economic ordering of the Tsardom. And I gave public expression to that conviction. Events confirmed this view. It was these leagues and the central league of leagues that brought about the general strike which forced the hand of the Tsar. Trepoff discerned the power and the future rôle of the leagues and prohibited them.

<sup>1</sup> In October, 1904.

<sup>2</sup> The Finnish, Polish socialists and social revolutionaries entered into this league. The social democrats condemned it as preposterous.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE BEGINNINGS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT OF 1905

THE men who first undertook the spade work and cleared the ground for the great upheaval were humane, moderate workers, mostly from the provinces, whose strivings were free from all taint of crime and whose ideals did not go beyond a constitutional monarchy. Even parliamentary government was more than they asked for at first. But like most Russian politicians they knew not what they were doing. Plehve was no more. The Japanese war was taking an unfavourable turn and the head of the government was anxious to hit upon some *modus vivendi* with the intelligentsia. I remember the historic Saturday afternoon<sup>1</sup> when ninety-eight country gentlemen, without a mandate from the people or permission from the government, met together in a private flat on one of the quays of St. Petersburg to discuss the best way of rearranging the relations between the rulers and the ruled. Their meeting the authorities had promised to connive at on condition that they should eliminate all political discussions from their programme, but to this they refused to agree. I knew many of them for mild and loyal citizens who were quite ready to pull out the keystone, but innocently believed that they could still maintain the arch. In particular, Prince Lvoff and my friend Count Heyden were paragons of reasonableness. I was not surprised, therefore, to learn that when the resolution calling for constitutional government was put to the ninety-eight members present, twenty-seven considered the demand too radical and voted against it, while the remainder gave it their support. The congress was a success. From all parts of the Empire came telegrams from town councils and zemstvos endorsing the resolution. The Russian people were on fire. All sections of society, all classes of the

<sup>1</sup> 19th November, 1904. Cf. *North American Review*.

population, drawn from their moorings by the new current, hastened to avail themselves of the slightest pretext to come together and demand the abolition of one-man power. The lawyers of St. Petersburg signed a petition praying for constitutional government. The working men organised a vast manifestation in favour of representative institutions. Authors took to propagating liberal doctrines throughout the Empire. Journalists vied with authors. Municipalities, guilds, benevolent associations, seconded the demands of the zemstvos. A section of students published a manifesto in which they proclaimed that autocracy must cease to be, the "infamous war must be stopped, and a Constitutional Assembly immediately convoked." At first all that the leaders wanted was practical recognition of the principle that the time had come for progressive and systematic adaptations of the State and its institutions to the new exigencies, as though mere political reforms could now save Tsarism and the bureaucracy.

All the older parties took higher ground, clamoured for more radical changes, and looked to the war and its vicissitudes for some precipitating event that should give them the opportunity for which they had so long waited in vain. Symptoms of a change in the mood of labour struck attentive observers and heightened the gravity of the crisis. Timid men waxed bold and made public confession of their faith, regardless of consequences to themselves; princes stepped forward as champions of the peasants; wealthy landowners subscribed to the funds for agitating against the regime; Prince Viazemsky publicly protested against an attack by the Cossacks on a crowd in front of the Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg and was sent in disgrace to his estate by the Tsar. Bureaucrats who had theretofore stood by the government now announced that, come what might, they would throw in their lot with the people. And of the temper, the ideals, and the mental workings of the people they had not even an approximate notion. For instance, an official of my acquaintance, who was about to be appointed to the governorship of a certain province, signed a petition

for a legislative assembly and thereby ruined his career. The unanimous council of the St. Petersburg Polytechnic Institute—a model educational establishment founded by Witte—forwarded a memorial to the Minister of Finances, recording their firm conviction that technical education was impossible so long as the political and social conditions inseparable from autocracy remained unchanged. The municipality of Yalta telegraphed to Prince Mirsky its certitude that the high bill of mortality in the towns and cities of Russia was one of the direct effects of the autocracy, and could not be bettered until the cause was removed. The legal bar of St. Petersburg and Moscow sent a deputation to the capital to petition for representative government. In a word the reformers—and practically all the intellectuals were now reformers—made arrows out of every wood that came handy.

On 12th December the provincial Zemsky Congress of Kaluga forwarded an address to the Emperor, which created a stir throughout the length and breadth of Russia. The members archly volunteered to rally round his Majesty and support him “against the enemies of law and order,” *i.e.*, the *bureaucracy*. They ended their address with a hope that the Tsar would summon elected representatives of the land to contribute to its peaceful development and prosperity.

The Moscow Town Council unanimously adopted a resolution declaring the absolute necessity of such reforms as the legal protection of the individual against the arbitrary measures of officialdom; the repeal of those exceptional regulations which invested the local authorities with power to imprison or banish anybody without assigning a reason; freedom of creed, of the press, of meeting, and of association; a popular chamber to watch over these popular rights and to supervise the government. The St. Petersburg municipality adopted a similar resolution. Banquets were organised at which fiery speeches were delivered, like those we read of in Paris on the eve of the great revolution. At one of these festive gatherings in a public hall the guests, numbering several thousands, covered the portrait of the

Tsar with a red flag, on which the inscription was painfully visible in white letters, "Down with the Autocracy." At many others the two men who killed Plehve were unanimously honoured. The counsel for Sazonoff—one of the two—said in his speech for the defence, "The bomb which blew M. Plehve to pieces was filled not with dynamite, but with the tears of the widows and orphans of those whom he had sent to the scaffold, to dreary dungeons, and to Siberia." No such plain speaking had been heard since Russia became an Empire.

The imperial family, in the person of one of the empresses, had been warned by royalties abroad that it would be greatly to the advantage of the autocrat, as well as of autocracy, if a sop were thrown to the popular Cerberus. Good grounds were alleged for this opinion, and the Tsar was gradually attuned to a conciliatory mood. He professed his willingness to make concessions and to promise reforms; but he would not, of course, put sharp weapons into the hands of "his children," and "still less would he divest himself of any of the powers with which God Himself had invested him." That was the monarch's attitude—unforeseen by many of the liberals who had looked forward either to frank opposition or graceful consent. And his acts were in harmony with it.<sup>1</sup> He warmly supported the minister, Prince Mirsky, against whom an intrigue was coarsely spun by a number of courtiers and by the ubiquitous grand duke. For a while he allowed the press to have its fling and the zemstvo representatives to speak their minds; but there he drew the line. There must be no tampering with the rights and prerogatives of the absolute monarchy. Whatever else might go they at any rate should remain inviolate and inviolable. Neither must the war be condemned nor peace with the Japanese advocated. Russia, and more especially the reigning dynasty, had need, he said, of a decisive victory over the yellow-skins. The newspapers were accordingly prohibited from publishing any of the cries for peace which were being plaintively or menacingly uttered all over the country.

At last the Emperor showed his hand and announced the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *North American Review*.

measure to which all those petty concessions formed the prelude. A ukase was drawn up granting certain reforms. It was to have been promulgated on 19th December, but almost on the eve considerable changes were made in the wording and its publication was delayed. In its original shape it covered the political and agrarian fields, laid down regulations for the press, defined the rights of religious non-conformists, introduced State insurance for working men, theoretically substituted law for caprice, and provided for the creation of an assembly with a consultative voice in legislation. Such were the general contents of the nine clauses of Witte's pristine scheme. The consultative Duma he proposed to convoke was to be elected, not directly by the people, but by the zemstvos for the rural population and by the municipal councils for the cities and towns. This assembly would have been devoid of initiative and without control over the public purse. Its function would be to examine and pronounce upon bills which had been passed by the Council of the Empire, but had not yet received the imperial sanction. As, however, the Council of the Empire itself possessed no claim to legislate, but only to make proposals which the Tsar could accept, modify, or thrust aside at will, the projected Duma, its critics argued, would have been the fifth wheel in the State chariot. Still, as a pledge of something more substantial to come, many would have welcomed it. This ninth clause, which was the pith of the project, had the approval of Witte, Prince Mirsky, and three other responsible officials.

The Tsar when he read the draft angrily struck out the last clause. "It is wasted effort," he exclaimed, "to ask me to sap or weaken the autocracy." In vain Prince Mirsky urged that the Duma planned by Witte would leave all his powers and prerogatives intact. He was unconvinced and stubborn. And seeing that the Grand Duke Sergius anathematised the plan as subversive, and had a savage attack on it published in his own press organ,<sup>1</sup> the ninth clause was expunged. By foolish resistance like this to every proposal

<sup>1</sup> *Slovo*.

which, by giving temporary satisfaction to the demands for reform, would have created a safety valve to carry off dangerous revolutionary energies, Nicholas II. stored up the vast forces which ultimately swept the autocracy away. A ruler of a different temperament, one like the Grand Duke Vladimir, or even the Tsar's weak and plastic brother Michael, would have bent to the various storms and prolonged the life of the dynasty. Nicholas II. was incapable of any such compromise, because he failed to take in the situation, to gauge the national and international forces that had shaped it, to perceive the bearings of these on the regime and the dynasty, and also because he was wanting in moral courage and political suppleness. He never represented anything adequately, not even the petty interests of his own house. Unlike Witte, who with all his defects impressed one with the size and quality of an historic force, and for a while bulked large as the massive centre round which the hopes and energies of the reforming State-upholders clung, he stood for himself alone, and had no deep feeling even for his own cause. Genuine humanity, active benevolence, social duty received no admission among the motives that determined his public policy. Of his fellow-men he was hardly conscious; to their well-being and their sufferings he was callously indifferent.

It would, however, be rash to conclude that even a statesmanlike monarch, had there been one in the place of Nicholas II., would have been able by dint of political tact to do more than prolong the existence of the autocracy for a few years more. By its very terms the work of readjustment to radically changed and changing conditions was no longer feasible, the utmost still possible being the postponement of the fatal collapse. For, as already remarked, the Tsarist State was from the outset informed by the spirit of territorial conquest and its orientation was towards that, while at home a victorious race ruled over other races and a privileged class lorded it over the bulk of the nation. As long as these conditions—which alone gave cohesion to the parts—were upheld, things would go on as before, until the



whole organism was destroyed, but once change them, desist from territorial expansion, cultivate friendly relations with neighbouring States, introduce at home principles of equity in economics, of equality in politics, of liberty in religion, and the cement which alone held the rebellious elements together would forthwith crumble away. The State, like a boy's top that ceases to spin, could not but lose its equilibrium, wobble, and fall.

That was the cardinal truth which ought to have been grasped by Russian statesmen working for reform. Witte had lightning-like flashes of it. He at any rate was eager to substitute in advance voluntary and economic links for the irksome bonds of union which radical reform measures suddenly applied would sunder. He snatched at every opportunity to try the experiment. That was the principle which underlay his policy towards the Poles, the Finns, the Jews, the Armenians, and the other non-Russian peoples of the Empire, whenever he was free to turn his attention to them.

The liberals or intelligentsia started from a different and, as it seemed to me, entirely false conception of the terms of the problem. Mere doctrinaires, and moving far apart from the popular currents, they operated with borrowed theories and assumed that what was true, say, of France would hold good of Russia. Successors of the men who had "gone among the people" only to discover that they could not fathom the nation's depths, they entirely misunderstood the ideals and strivings of the peasantry. In their own political organisation they had enlisted neither peasants nor working men as members, and yet they came forward as the authorised spokesmen of both. And that group of westernised politicians always stood only for the intelligentsia or foreign political ideal-mongers who had no vested interests in the country, and dealt mainly in abstractions, imported conceptions, and exotic theories. This master fact of the new situation appears to have been wholly missed by our diplomacy, local and central. For Britain and France took the liberals, who subsequently became the Kadets, as their advisers, and made support of the Kadets the corner-stone of

their Russian policy. MM. Milyukoff, Gutchkoff, Rodzianko, and their friends were the oracles whose utterances were eagerly sought after and whose counsels were generally followed—with the deplorable results recorded in recent history. These were upright, honourable, enlightened men who lacked political experience and acquaintanceship with the temper of their own people.

From the first it was certain, if not obvious, that the radical reform of the Russian regime would entail the break-up of the State by the dissolution of the cement that had theretofore held its constituent parts together. That was the fundamental, ever-present danger inherent in every reform movement. And this redoubtable consequence was modifiable only within narrow time-limits, and provided that the throne was occupied by a statesman or else by a monarch who had chosen one as his minister, and that the most stringent self-control and prudence were exercised by the reformers. As for a violent rebellion with the aid or the connivance of the army, it was certain—considering the instincts and the ignorance of the lower classes—to culminate, not in a glorious revolution, but in swift disruption and ruin. This was the logical and necessary outcome of the ethnic, social, cultural, and religious conditions of the nation. Before the outbreak of November, 1905, I wrote, "Revolution in Russia will prove to be a very different process from what it was in France or elsewhere . . . it may at certain stages be marked by a degree of ferocity which the peoples of the United States and Western Europe can hardly realise."<sup>1</sup> That forecast was published nearly twelve years before the Bolshevik revolution of September, 1917, which amply confirmed it.

But the leading spirits of the liberal party were dissatisfied with the reforms outlined in the ukase and with Witte, to whom the wording of them was attributed. They com-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *North American Review*, January, 1905, p. 300. I remembered this and similar forecasts of mine in the following year when reading of the unfortunate men whom the revolutionists set to dance on hot sheets of iron and then slowly burned to death.

plained that the Tsar was selling dearly and in detail what they had petitioned him to bestow upon them gratis and wholesale, and, worse still, that he did not intend to deliver what he had sold. They had sued for the abolition of classes and class privileges and he promised the disappearance of certain legal disabilities which weighed upon the peasants. They had agitated in favour of liberty of conscience and he dangled before them the revision of the legislation restricting the rights of certain nonconformist sects and the removal of disabilities which did not derive from statute law. They had prayed for the repeal of the coercion ukase, known by the name of Protective Regulations, which placed the liberty and life of all Russians at the mercy of the local jacks-in-office, and he merely gave instructions to lessen the number of the districts thus trodden underfoot. They had besought him to grant liberty of the press, but all that he undertook was to remove "the superfluous" restrictions placed upon it, and meanwhile newspapers were being suspended or suppressed. They had claimed the right of public meeting and of association, but these claims he wholly ignored. They had begged that Ukrainians, Poles, Finns, Jews, Armenians—all the great non-Russian elements, in a word—might be delivered from the persecution they were enduring, but the ukase engaged only to strike off those legal fetters which were not conditioned "by the vital interests of the State and the manifest advantage of the Russian people." Who was to define these? The persecuting bureaucracy. And worse than everything else, the representative assembly, which was to have been, so to say, the corner-stone of regenerated Russia, was relegated to the limbo of things that might have been.

To sum up, the measures announced in the manifesto would, it was urged, be absurdly inadequate even if they were meant to be realised. And they could never take root because they would always be liable to be withdrawn, that being the end of all reforms in Russia. People called to mind that several of the more important concessions made from the days of Nicholas I. had been either formally repealed or

else cunningly counteracted by the ministers of Alexander III. or of Nicholas II. The very ukase to which the wretched serfs owed their emancipation had since then been partially evaded, and the peasantry were being tied to the soil anew by M. Plehve when his life was suddenly snuffed out. Yet those concessions had been not merely promised, but actually realised; they formed part of the law of the Empire. That did not save them from partial abolition. Were the reforms just promised likely to be durable, if those which were actually embodied in legislation were so successfully undermined? Russia, in the person of her spokesmen, answered, "No."

If the reformers were ordinarily exacting beyond measure, their demands in this case were moderate and their strictures unanswerable. The first paragraph of the ukase, they objected, proclaimed the inauguration of a reign of law and the abolition of caprice. This loud-sounding improvement was in reality merely a paraphrase of the 47th paragraph of the fundamental laws of the Empire which Prince Dolgoruki had termed "*la plus volumineuse des mauvaises plaisanteries*"—and it had remained a dead letter for generations because of the greed of arbitrary power displayed by the bureaucracy. And as it had been in the past, so it would be in the future. If the Tsar were in earnest about reform he would surely have forbidden the punishment of any of his subjects otherwise than by sentence of the law courts. That he did not take this direct, simple, and effective method was, they held, proof that his intention was only conditional.

How superficial was the attention paid by the Tsar to legislative work may be gathered from the following farcical *quid pro quo* which took place when Witte was Minister of Finances. A bill was introduced in the Council of the Empire to indemnify landed proprietors in the Baltic provinces for the losses they had incurred through the government monopoly of alcohol. Witte held that the payment of a sum of several millions should be spread over a number of years, the majority maintained that it ought to be effected at once. The minister first informed the Tsar of this divergence, and the

Tsar promised to ratify the view of the minority. The minister then wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Council, Phehve, telling him that the Emperor had promised to acquiesce in the decision of the minority as soon as the documents were placed before him. Plehve freely communicated this announcement to all the members, whereupon many officials, seeing that opposition would be fruitless, changed their views or their votes, so that the minority unexpectedly became the majority. In the course of time the documents were laid before the Tsar, who remembered only that he had pledged himself to Witte to reject the proposal of the majority. Accordingly, without reading the papers or taking further thought, he redeemed his promise, and the wrong bill became law.

In the administration as in legislation he frequently interposed with like rashness and with untoward consequences. For the motives that actuated him were generally personal and sometimes irreconcilable with the principles of justice which, had he allowed things to take their course, would have been applied. I remember the case of a journalist with whom I was slightly acquainted. In a twinkling he was very suddenly whirled away from Petersburg to Siberia, without being allowed time to take money or warm clothing with him, because of an article of his, or rather because of the interpretation put upon it by the Tsar's confessor, Yanisheff Amphitheatroff, the journalist, published a moderately interesting article describing the home circle of a landed proprietor, whom he depicted as firm and strict with his family, and so scrupulous in his dealings with the other sex that he boiled with indignation if his wife's chambermaid flirted with any male relative or stranger. He had a sympathetic son, with eyes like a gazelle's—a well-meaning youth who wished everybody to be happy, but was devoid of ideas on practical matters. The kind-hearted mother sat between father and son, tenderly loving both. It was an idyllic picture of Russian life at its best—and nothing more. The censor read it and saw nothing wrong. The minister, Sipyaghin, glanced at it and passed on cheerfully to his hot

pancakes and cold caviare. The Tsar himself perused it and liked it: it was "such a pleasing picture of the serene life of a Russian squire." But the Emperor's chaplain, Yanisheff, descried high treason between the lines. According to him, and he was probably right, the landed proprietor, who struck the table with his fist whenever he heard of a little flirtation on the part of his wife's maid, was no other than the Emperor Alexander III.; the son with the sympathetic eyes and vacillating character was Nicholas II. As the portrait, if intended as such, was not flattering, it needed courage on the part of the priest even to hint that the ingenuous youth of limited ideas was obviously his Majesty; and the Tsar must be credited with considerable modesty to have placed the cap on his imperial head. He at once summoned and questioned his minister Sipyaghin. "Yes, I read the *feuilleton*, your Majesty, but noticed nothing offensive in it." "Well," replied the Emperor, "you may take it from me that it is a treasonable skit on my never-to-be-forgotten father and myself. Send the fellow to Siberia." And to Siberia he was whisked away, without a chance to buy warm clothing for the journey or to get money for his needs. It was not much consolation to M. Amphitheatroff that he was subsequently pardoned for a mere misdemeanour of which he said he was innocent and then banished to Vologda.

Witte, whose steady pacifism stamped a profound influence on Russian politics generally and gained for his imperial master the nowise merited reputation of a humane, moral, and generous monarch, was constantly urging upon him the necessity of political reforms in the interest both of the autocracy and the nation. "The autocracy," he would remark to me in our long conversations, "is but a mode of conceiving the relations between the ruling board and the nation. And with vision, enterprise, and resource it can be made as productive of good as a parliamentary government, especially in a backward country like ours. But you must first find a monarch which wisdom, enterprise, and resource, or with discrimination and modesty enough to select a

statesman who possesses them and to maintain him in office. Alexander II. was such a monarch and I shall never cease to lament his death." He perceived with painful clearness that the elements of the nation were ill-assorted, that most institutions were disorganised, and that anarchist ideas fitted in with the social and political conditions. Therefore he strove to get these changed. A simulacrum of reforms was, as we saw, dangled before the eyes of the nation in March, 1903, a mere promise which would, it was hoped, produce a sedative effect and then pass into easy oblivion. It was drafted by Plehve, bore the stamp of his inspiration, and made a considerable stir in Russia and abroad. Taken in consideration with the high reputation which had been created for the Tsar it was believed to portend great and beneficent changes. But stripped of the tawdry wrappings in which Plehve enveloped it, what it amounted to was the abolition of the peasants' joint responsibility for taxation and the removal of some religious restrictions.

Witte, who had a keen eye for religious intolerance and proselytism by the State, and was never tired of pleading the cause of freedom, had moved the Emperor to make this sorely needed concession to the spirit of the time. But beyond the promise he could not get the bureaucracy or its agents to move. He would sometimes lose patience utterly and exclaim to me, "How can I hinder a revolution if even such anodyne measures are deemed too radical to be carried out? I begin to despair of the autocracy." In the most sanative elements of his policy Witte was over-ruled by a crowd of puny men without responsibility before history or even before their contemporaries. After the manifesto promising religious freedom, the Jews were hampered and "squeezed" perhaps more systematically than before, and by no one more intensely than by the Emperor's uncle, the Grand Duke Sergius, the Governor-General of Moscow. Roman Catholics were also the objects of continual chicanery, especially in the Polish provinces, and the law obliging those among them who married persons of the Orthodox Church to bring up their children in the State creed was applied with rigour.

To belong to the Armenian Church was to be branded with the mark of Cain, and at times it was worse to be a Russian nonconformist than to worship idols or to prison one's neighbour.

The Tsar was smitten with political blindness after the first year of his reign, and he insisted all the more on moving about among the institutions of his country, modifying their working congruously with his whims. On religious matters in particular he was narrow-minded. At the time of the manifesto the new Russian penal code was being elaborated, and the section dealing with crimes against faith was under discussion. Here the Emperor's supposed mild and tolerant spirit was expected to bring about great and desirable changes. But the hope was disappointed. One change was made for the better, but only one, and that he assented to most reluctantly. An Orthodox believer who desired to leave his denomination might thenceforward go abroad and there change his religion without fear of punishment, whereas formerly he was liable to pains and penalties. That was all. But if such a man, being unable to go abroad, should ask a Russian Lutheran or Roman Catholic priest to receive him into his Church, the minister in question must refuse. To comply with the request would entail severe punishment.

There can be no doubt about the Emperor's personal part in hindering his subjects from serving God in their own way, for it was vigorous, personal, and direct. Whenever the existing institutions or the responsible ministers were inclined to loosen the grip of the law on the conscience of the individual, the Tsar's veto formed an insuperable impediment. Here is one instructive example. The edicts dealing with religious misdemeanours being under discussion a minority of the Council of the Empire steadily advocated toleration; but at every turn his Majesty sided with the majority. Once, and only once, the bulk of the members favoured a clause which was reasonable and humane; and then the Emperor quashed their decision without hesitation. The question was, If a Russian who is Orthodox only in name and something else—say Lutheran—in reality asks



During the latter period of his career, which began after my departure from Russia, and continued until his tragic death, Rasputin appears to have had a hand in some of the political as well as most of the ecclesiastical changes that took place, and while giving pastors to the Church, to have allowed the old Adam, who had apparently died in himself at the time of his conversion, to revive in all his pristine hideousness. A drunkard and a profligate in the eyes of the profane, he still remained a man of God, a wonder-worker, and a prophet to the initiated of the court circle, of which he had now become the centre. All the reformers and most of the parliamentary parties outside regarded him as the symbol of all that was unjust, oppressive, and infamous in the autocracy. And this was his real significance. He was a symbol for the anti-autocratic parties. But apart from the utter incongruity of allowing such a clumsy mummer to have a voice in any of the affairs of Church or State, it has not yet been proved that his influence on the destinies of the Empire was as profound or far-reaching as is alleged. To me Rasputin seems to have been but one of the symptoms of the disease of which the Tsardom was dying.

He was a reagent that united what was best in the country against the dark powers of which he stood forth as the exponent. The Duma, the press, the nobility, the zemstvos, were all determined to put an end to the outrageous farce which was being enacted in the midst of a world tragedy, and to immobilise the wire-pullers who were exploiting it for their ends. Rasputin's career was the *reductio ad absurdum* of the Tsarist State. It focussed multitudinous evils and seemed to give to the many-headed bureaucracy what the Roman emperor desired for his peoples, a single neck that might be severed at a blow.

Several plots were hatched against his life at various stages of his career. Of these by far the most dangerous was engineered by a single person—a jealous woman who had believed in him, lived with him, and loved him for years, before she became the admirer of his enemy, the monk Iliodor. One day in the streets she plunged a knife into his

abdomen and narrowly escaped lynching at the hands of his worshippers. Rasputin's wound was grievous and he lay for many weeks in hospital, but his hale, robust nature finally pulled him through. His fair assailant, K. Gusseva, whose hero he had been for years, declared at the police station when charged with the crime that he was no better than a seducer of women, and that death was what the impostor had merited. She was sent to a madhouse. On another occasion a conspiracy was said to have been devised by no less a personage than the Minister of the Interior<sup>1</sup> whose testimony I adduced above respecting the marvellous powers of the thaumaturge. This responsible member of the government, who had often told his friends that Rasputin's proper place was not with the Emperor of Russia but with the Emperor of Heaven, is accused of having suborned the unfrocked monk Iliodor to assassinate the Starets. It was this same Iliodor who some years before helped to introduce Rasputin to the court and had latterly anathematised him as a third-rate anti-Christ. But this plot was revealed before it could be executed, and the erring minister was restored to private life.

Around the last conspiracy which terminated the seer's career legend has spun a web of mystery, patriotism, and romance which savours of the Florence of the Medici. Nearly all Russia applauded the heroic deed which sent the drunken, obscene satyr to his last account at a banquet worthy of Lorenzo the Magnificent. This universal and enthusiastic approval of a bloody act of treachery is, in my judgment, one of the most characteristic traits of Russian public opinion and sentiment. The attitude of the nation, which not only forgave but eulogised the crime for the sake of 'the murderers' supposed motives, gives one the measure of public morality and of the rottenness of the State which could no longer exist without the help of murder and treachery in high quarters and in low.

Strange echoes of mediæval times are awakened by Rasputin's life story, which reminds one of the hero of

<sup>1</sup> A. N. Khvostoff.

Calderon's *Life a Dream*. The worshippers who revered him as a saint, the court ladies who, at the end of their letters, kissed the "dear little hands and feet" of the slovenly, unkempt satyr, the dignitaries and ministers who sent him respectful telegrams, the bishops and archbishops who pushed him into the limelight of the court, all knew his antecedents. They were aware that he had been publicly flogged for horse-stealing, that he had been arrested for rape, and that a charge of perjury was hanging over his head. Deliberately ignoring the conclusions to be drawn from these facts, they one and all recognised him as their spiritual leader.

In Britain and France the public is unable to understand how the lofty, the base, the spiritual, and the sensual can thus be interwoven together by people endowed with reason and moral conscience. The answer is that the Russian psyche is capable of other syntheses even more difficult to understand than this. Who, for instance, before the war would have believed it possible for a Russian government of brotherhood and goodwill to make peace with the enemy and wage war on their own brethren, to abolish capital punishment and inaugurate indiscriminate mass massacres, to preach universal freedom and punish expressions of opinion unfavourable to itself, to proclaim government by the people and to chastise the people for expressing its legitimate wishes, to lay down the right of every nation to govern itself and to trample on the Ukrainians and the Finns for attempting to avail themselves of the principle? Westerns have not yet learned to understand the psychology of Russia.

Neither can they put themselves in the position of serious Russians who, like the Minister Khvostoff and Bishop Hermogen, seem to believe in the virtue of his incantations and the precision of his second sight. Only Westerns of intense susceptibility, who have lived in the country among the people and as one of the people, can come to an understanding of their old-world mysticism which pictures our lives as stretching before and behind us into dim regions

void of time and space. It was through that medium that his countrymen viewed Rasputin.

The strangest of the many coincidences which stamped him in their eyes as a seer and a sorcerer was that which may be discovered between his most audacious prophecy and the sequel to his tragic death. He had told the Tsar and Tsaritsa, and repeated to many others as well as to me, that his destiny was entwined with the destinies of the Romanoffs and the Tsardom, and that his death would bring doom and disaster to them all. And hardly was his lifeless body thrust under the ice when the Empress was taken ill. Soon afterwards her son and two of her daughters were seized with illness and confined to bed. Then the sovereign was deposed, insulted, imprisoned, the army dissolved, the Empire abolished, and mighty Russia broken up into a number of fragmentary powerless States into which no new life-current has entered. What ancient oracle or prophet can point to so many fateful predictions accomplished?

Rasputin, had he been the ambitious or the calculating politician portrayed by Gutchkoff and other parliamentary orators, would have taken the first revelation of his power over the autocrat for an intimation to use it to the fullest extent for the common good, or for some great purpose of his own, and would have composed the remainder of his career to oneness with that aim. But he did nothing of the kind. He had no great purpose, good or evil, nothing but insatiable thirst for coarsest pleasures of sense. He reminded me of the Ukrainian of whom the story ran that he exclaimed, "How I should love to be Tsar. I know what I then would do. I would steal a hundred roubles and from early morning until late at night I would gorge myself on bacon. Ah! if only I were Tsar!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### RUSSIA'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

BETWEEN the principles underlying the foreign policy of the Tsardom and those that shaped the public and private conduct of its authorised trustees there was an unmistakable family likeness. The background of the curious events recorded in this chapter of Russia's international relations—in so far as these were the results of deliberate endeavours on the part of the Petersburg Foreign Office—may be recalled in outline by many readers. The West European beheld these occurrences through a roseate haze, which made the Tsardom seem the one deep gambler among European States and the most astute. And as for the tactics of the wire-pullers in Petersburg, they were taken to be so deft and efficacious that a veritable wizard could hardly detect in them anything to better. However desultory or aimless circumstance or folly might make the intercourse of the remaining powers with each other, Russia's course was believed to be steadfastly directed towards the unchanging far-off goal fixed for her by the genial Peter. Faith in the depth of the Tsar's designs and also in the inexhaustible strength of their countless battalions remained unshaken even after the Russian defeat in Manchuria. And yet the previous war against, and victory over, the Turks in the reign of Alexander II. afforded ample proof that neither assumption was well grounded. Moreover, no one who had an opportunity of scrutinising at fairly close quarters the procession of statesmen who glided across the Russian stage from Gortchakoff to Sazonoff could discover in the men any qualities more genial than average mother-wit, or any aims in their political strategy more subtle than the attainment of certain secondary objects, the utilisation of casual opportunities, the fulfilment of a personal desire of the sovereign,

or even the wreaking of vengeance on a rival statesman. In vain we ransack the records of the past fifty years for indisputable evidences of the steady political purpose for which down to the March revolution all Europe gave them credit. It is humiliating to realise how easily legends like that which was woven about the sagacity, self-discipline, and perseverance of the rulers of the Tsardom can be foisted on mankind as verdicts of history.

During the past three reigns Russia's foreign policy was made up largely of aims believed at first to be vital, pursued for a time with vigour, and finally discarded as harmful. And in the methods employed from Gortchakoff's death down to M. Izvolsky's advent to power one finds little that indicates grasp of fact, breadth of vision, or capacity for construction. And as for the thankless task of grafting ethical principles upon the stock of Russian politics, it would not seem to have been undertaken or contemplated by any one of the ministers who transacted the international affairs of the Tsardom within the period mentioned. Not to go back further than the year 1894, I can distinctly call to mind an experience I had in Constantinople—one of a long series. I had gone thither to inquire into the truth of the reports about a massacre of Armenians which it was alleged had taken place in the district of Sassun. Before I started I had been assured that there was no truth in the rumours. As Professor Vamberg of Budapest was one of those who vouched for this reassuring statement I felt disposed to accept it provisionally. Before starting for Armenia, however, I called on a Russian statesman with whom I was on very friendly terms and requested him to confide to me the truth. He said, "I will talk to you as a friend. What I say is for your guidance, not for publication. The massacres did take place. I will give you some ghastly details, for the accuracy of which I vouch. We have Armenians in prison for conspiring against the Sultan. They could not honestly do otherwise. Your government has asked—and I may say asked somewhat insistently—for an international inquiry with a view to a collective intervention of the powers. That

may be a highly ethical step to take, but believe me it is not a wise one. It will do harm to the Armenians.<sup>1</sup> The French government and ours, being Christian and European, have agreed to participate in the step suggested by Queen Victoria's advisers. That will give employment to the embassies and consulates of the interested powers. But your ambassador in Constantinople fancies that we shall also join in putting pressure on the Sultan. That is an allusion. We have no such intention. Indeed, we are resolved to eschew all action joint and isolated. When the inquiry is over, which will establish the guilt of the Moslem population of Kurdistan and, I must add, of the Stambul cabinet, the work of Russia and France will be over together with it. It will have no practical consequences, and the Sultan knows it. There, now you have the truth."

But Sir Philip Currie did not know it. And when having cautiously questioned him on the subject I received his answer that the three governments would force Abdul Hamid to rue the day when he prescribed mass massacre, and to change his tack, I ventured to inquire, "Are you quite sure of that?" "Yes, do you doubt it?" "I confess I am not very hopeful." "Well, allow me to be so, and please give me credit for knowing something more about the matter than you do." I fear I did not give him credit for knowing the only thing that mattered just then. I at once went to Armenia, disguised as a Russian general, collected evidence about the massacres, made a map of the country in which they occurred, and had the melancholy satisfaction to see my friend the eminent statesman's forecast borne out by events. Thus it was Russia's interest to allow this crying sin against humanity to go unpunished in order that the process of decomposition in the Ottoman Empire might continue unchecked. This attitude was in strict accordance, not indeed with any testament left by Peter the Great, but with the whole spirit of the Tsarist State from its first foundation down to March, 1917, when it was fighting for the goods if

<sup>1</sup>It did them great harm. Soon after I left Armenia most of my Armenian friends were massacred, and not my friends only.

not the good of some of the lesser nationalities like Poland and expecting Constantinople for its reward.

Russia's foreign policy in the past, whatever its real motives, may therefore be summarily described in the light of its effects as ruinous "protection" of the feeble. It was the lethal hug of the polar bear. She would shield the government of a weaker neighbour from the immediate consequences of its own folly and enable it to go on misgoverning its subjects, thwarting attempts at internal reform, financial and administrative. The body politic would thus be left to decompose until it entered upon a stage sufficiently advanced to allow of it being digested almost without an effort. Hence the common argument derived from her alleged peaceful disposition, put forward by her partisans in England and elsewhere—who claim that she had no intention to annex this or that strip of territory, to take, say, Port Arthur until forced by Germany's aggression in Kiao Chow—however true in fact, is devoid of force. For part of her plan was precisely to respect the technical frontiers of the country which she hoped to subdue and to refrain from snatching a part in order ultimately to obtain the whole. The seizure of a country bit by bit would only have awakened feelings of jealousy and other unchristian sentiments in the hearts of covetous neighbours. As a cynical diplomatist once expressed himself, "It is the way of the vulture with the dying ass: leave the body until it is sufficiently decomposed and then swallow it all; the vulture's only fear being lest the jackal should come upon the scene and devour the animal before the process is completed." It is thus that Georgia, Persia, Turkey, China, Korea, were dealt with.

Since the partition of Poland, to which the Empress Maria Theresa once alluded regretfully as "*cette division si injuste et si inégale*," Russia's protective policy has undergone no material change. Catherine, who was then the ruler of Muscovy, would fain have left Poland untouched, scrupulously respecting the technical frontiers of the kingdom while effectually hindering the abolition of the veto and the introduction of any reform of the constitution. She was



convinced that when Poland had stewed long enough in its own juice, Muscovy might then step in and enjoy the banquet all alone. It was with this object that she bribed a number of unprincipled Poles to keep the abuses unchanged. But Frederick, seeing through the plan, baffled it and, curiously enough, in almost the same way in which his successor Wilhelm II. discerned the policy which Russia was pursuing in China, and foiled that by obtaining Kiao Chow and forcing the hand of the Tsar.

Only once has this method undergone a modification, and for that there were special reasons. Bulgaria was not methodically "protected" in the special sense of the term. Frank Russian diplomatists were wont to explain that chapter of Russian history thus: "We have only two ways of dealing with weaker nations, and they are exemplified in our treatment of Georgia and Bulgaria. The kingdom of Georgia came to us and asked for an alliance. We made it. Some time afterwards the Georgians fell upon evil days. Being attacked by Persia they claimed our active help as equals and allies. But we answered that we were too busy elsewhere, and left them to their fate. Thereupon the Persians fell upon them and killed two men out of every three, so that the nation was literally bleeding to death. Then the Georgians came to us a second time, now no longer as equals and allies, but as humble suppliants. 'Help us,' they said, 'not as friends aid friends, but as masters rescue their slaves.' And this time we helped them effectually and absorbed their country over and above. But in the case of the Bulgarians we committed an unpardonable blunder. They appealed to us as brothers, and instead of waiting until they also had lost two men out of every three, we freed them from the Turkish yoke without more ado, after which the little brothers developed into enemies. We shall not make the same mistake with the Macedonians or the Armenians."

And the system carried out in Georgia was the same that was being tried in Turkey and elsewhere. Thus "protection" was the main principle which underlay the

Hunkiar Skelessi Treaty concluded with the Porte.<sup>1</sup> By the terms of this agreement Russia undertook to "protect" Turkey from all maritime foes, while that empire was mouldering slowly away. The Sultan was humoured, pampered, and his throne propped while his regime was ruining his people. Armenians, Slavs, and even Mohammedans were revolted by the system. The navy dwindled to a mere name; the soldiers were unpaid; fortresses were left without guns; officials were literally forced to live by extortion. The Ottoman Empire would soon have been ripe for the vulture if the jackal had not come unawares to feast on the remains of the body politic. Germany looked with longing upon Asia Minor and created commercial interests there, and the semi-atrophied organs were galvanised by the breath of new life.

The tripartite Eastern tangle which so long exercised the ingenuity, and drew out the least estimable traits, of Europe's diplomatists was to a large extent twisted and coiled by the Tsars and their State Secretaries. In this respect there was no essential difference in the treatment applied to the Near, the Middle, and the Far East. The patient was first coaxed or bullied into making a will—in diplomatic language, a secret treaty—in Russia's favour, was then forbidden to call in a doctor, and in some cases forced to sip slow poison in lieu of efficacious medicaments. It was thus that as far back as 1723 Muscovy undertook to "protect" Persia against the Afghans in return for a secret treaty making over to her the Persian provinces on the Caspian. And ever since then, with some pauses and a few failures, the Tsars went on fostering the process of gangrene which was eating away the energies, material and moral, of a people, never indeed progressive or promising, but hardly deserving such a miserable fate.

The results were striking. Four Persian provinces—Mazenderan, Khorassan, Azerbaijan, and Ghilan—fell as completely under Russia's thumb as if they were actually occupied by her troops. The administrative wires were

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Contemporary Review*, July, 1904.

pulled by her representatives in Teheran and the Shah was enabled to live in luxurious vice while his people toiled and moiled in squalid misery. Persia was poor, its bureaucracy corrupt, all officers being bought and sold at the expense of the masses, justice was poisoned at its source, law was a myth, the spendthrift Shah was arbitrary and cruel, and the people periodically famine-stricken. And the Tsars, whose heaven-sent mission was to diffuse Christian light and truth and justice, invoked the sacredness of treaties and insisted on these things remaining as they were.

Lord Salisbury made a praiseworthy effort to change them by identifying Britain's interests with Persia's material and moral well-being. As the Shah's government needed money he volunteered to advance a certain sum and to consent to Russia supplying as much again on the express condition that the proceeds of the loan should be spent on the nation's needs. The exchange of views and shaping of measures to this end were going slowly forward between London and Petersburg when, one day, the British Premier learnt to his dismay that the Russian Finance Minister had surreptitiously struck up an arrangement with the Shah, supplied him not merely with Russia's own quota of the loan, but with all the money that was to be allotted by both governments, and let him spend two out of the four million pounds on the gratification of his personal whims and vices. And Persia's needs? Ways of communication were peremptorily required, but the Tsars not only connived at the Shah's ministers, who ignored this, but positively forbade the construction of a single line and, indeed, vetoed every attempt to better the country economically. They recognised the need for railways, but seeing themselves unable to afford the necessary funds for the purpose would brook no attempt on the part of others to provide them. And when Lord Salisbury asked the Tsar's Foreign Secretary for an explanation, this official made answer that it was the Finance Minister who had taken the measures complained of, and over him the Foreign Office had, of course, no authority. In Turkey the same dog-in-the-manger policy and Spenlow and Jorkins procedure were

persisted in down to a few years before the war, and even Russia's faithful ally France, occasionally losing patience, uttered plangent representations and humble requests and was grateful for even the slight concessions which M. Sazonoff made when he was minister.

Under that treatment the Persian body politic was rotting limb by limb, until M. Izvolsky taking over the portfolio of Foreign Affairs ordered his diplomatic subalterns to turn over a new leaf and supplied a fresh proof of the impotence of individual officials to modify the deep-rooted instincts of Tsarism. For the most part the Russian employees in Persia offered passive resistance to their new head. In particular the Tsar's minister at Teheran, Hartwig, deliberately perpetuated the abominable system of his predecessors in spite of the expostulations and remonstrances of his chief. People asked how he dared thus oppose the Foreign Office on which he depended. The answer was that he was encouraged and put up to it by the Tsar himself. And when at last M. Izvolsky extorted permission to recall the rebellious minister, Nicholas II. distinguished him, decorated him, told him that his was the only policy that the Russian nation could pursue with dignity and profit, and let it be known that it was with the utmost reluctance that he gave way to Izvolsky. Thereupon he entrusted Hartwig with the most responsible post in the Balkan peninsula.

This criticism of the demoralising action of the Tsardom in Persia, I should like to add, must not be taken to commit me to any theory which would recognise the present fitness of the Persians for a parliamentary regime. The Persians have lived for ages under grinding despotisms and their mental and moral temper, warped in that crushing mill, renders it temporarily difficult for them to enter into the spirit of the democratic regime in vogue in the West. I am aware that this view may be deemed erroneous—heretical—but there is a vast array of incontrovertible facts to support it. Russia profited in her own way by the helplessness of the Iranian people and Britain followed at a distance.

Many years ago I gave expression to these strictures on Russia's methods of shaping her intercourse with nations, and I stated that in Europe there were "still two predatory States, the Tsardom and Germany."<sup>1</sup> Discussing the chances of an Anglo-Russian understanding for which I was then zealously working I wrote: "The difficulties in the way are of a twofold character: the one formal, emanating from the awkward fact that Russia has come to look upon engagements entered into by her Foreign Minister as partial in extent and temporary in duration; the others have their roots in the fundamental policy hitherto pursued by the Muscovite Empire, the character of which seems incompatible with any parchment limitations."<sup>2</sup> And characterising the government of the country at its best I described it as "composed of public servants of his Majesty the Tsar, each of whom conscientiously strives to further what he deems to be the interests of his imperial master in the way which he considers most efficacious and without reference to the views, aims, or obligations of his colleagues."<sup>3</sup>

But the governments and the press of France and Britain took a much more sanguine view of the Tsardom and condescendingly bore with me as an "incorrigible but well-meaning pessimist." France had gone so far in her friendship for the great ally as to shut her eyes to the massacres of the Armenians and her ears to the piteous appeals for help made by the ill-starred population of Macedonia.

The methods applied in Russia to international affairs whenever a foreign government complained of a breach of treaty or an unredeemed promise I likened to that followed by the firm of Spenslow and Jorkins. Each minister would lay the responsibility on some colleague whose engagements bound only himself. It was thus that when Hayashi called on the Tsar's Foreign Secretary, Muravieff, and protested against the despatch of Russian military instructors to Korea, the answer came pat: "That is a step that was taken by my predecessor. I have nothing whatever to do with that."

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Contemporary Review*, June, 1904, p. 803.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 812.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem.*

In all these cases there was no central government, only a number of isolated State departments not one of which bound Russia or could pledge her word.

Thus duplicity and guile were the principal means employed in peace time to effect or prepare for that territorial expansion which was a standing postulate of the self-preservation of the Tsardom. Aggrandisement was being achieved gradually, almost imperceptibly, by means of railways, of secret treaties, of money lent to needy governments by the Tsar's ministers who themselves had to borrow it from France. And on the top of all this came intimidation. "My government," a Russian diplomatist at Peking, Tokio, or Seoul would virtually say, "represents a people of 160,000,000 and disposes of military and naval forces in proportion. If, therefore, you are bent on quarrelling with us you know what to expect." And the crestfallen diplomatist of the little State would give way at the green table lest his people should have to give way on the field of battle. In other words, he was beaten by bluff. In this way modern Muscovy long steered clear of great wars while harvesting in material successes which no other power could expect to win by mere diplomacy. In this way, too, she hoped to get the better of Japan, but that power, refusing to accept counters for current coin, at last and most unwillingly challenged her to carry out her implied threats, with the results which the world has witnessed. The other predatory State, Germany, put the same method into practice for over a generation until Russia at last cried, "Halt," but unlike the Tsardom, Germany's military strength was equal to, if anything greater than, her prestige and influence in diplomacy.

Between Russia and Britain a binding agreement existed and exists respecting Afghanistan. At the time of the Boer War, however, the Tsar's government came out with the theory that that covenant, having been struck up at a time when things were different, had ceased to be applicable, because "circumstances destroy the binding force of compacts," exactly the doctrine of the other predatory State,

Germany. Consequently the Petersburg Foreign Office signified its desire to enter into direct relations with the Emir. And accommodating action to theory, a letter to the same effect was despatched by the Tsar's ministers to the Emir's agent in Bokhara who sent it on unopened to his master. And at the same time Russia mobilised troops and transferred 4000 men from Tiflis to Kushk on the Afghan frontier. The Emir having kept the letter for some time in Kabul at last had it forwarded to Downing Street. Witte intervened, hindered what bade fair to become an expedition against Herat, and at my request announced that the real object of the mobilisation was but to make an experiment, not to inaugurate a campaign.

*The Tsar's Plot to seize the Heights  
of the Upper Bosphorus*

One of the most striking exhibitions of the temper of Tsarism occurred in the year 1896. I guardedly touched upon it several years later in an article which was necessarily euphemistic. But people refused to credit the story because it tended to throw a slur upon the Tsar whose loyalty was above question in England. Probably at no time and in no country since the reign of Louis XIV. in France have current events been so highly coloured, embellished, and grouped in such an unreal light as during the first ten years of the reign of Nicholas II. The French press, with the exception of a few uninfluential journals, was wont to extol him to the skies. In the comments passed on the various public manifestations of his policy one looked in vain for traces of average historic vision. Every move of the Petersburg government that could be construed as a cultural advance was eulogised and ascribed to the initiative of the high-minded monarch whose political wisdom was implicitly taken to be almost equal to his power, whereas deeds that could not be dovetailed with this fulsome theory were attributed to malevolent agents or boldly denied. In Great Britain a somewhat similar, if less inflexible, attitude was observed and it cost me repeated and strenuous efforts to enlighten public opinion. When my pseudonymous

article on the Tsar appeared in the *Quarterly Review*, its statements, tone, and conclusions were unctuously deprecated by a press accustomed to envisage the Russian ruler as an indispensable member of that happy family of monarchs who would in time lead Europe sensibly nearer to the cultural goal. He was the world's peace-preserver and much else, and only a Thersites could thus misread his acts. The artificial and precarious character of the apparent unity of his Empire, the rapacious instincts of the State, the morbid conceit and profound ignorance of its head, who would insist on transforming what was good into bad and on turning bad to worse by his constant intermeddling, were unsuspected or ignored by the panegyrists, English and French, of the Russian Tsar. It was they who prodigally conferred immortality on this pitiful specimen of a ruler, leader, or reformer, and pleaded in justification his high humanitarian instincts, his selfless devotion to the common good, and the courage with which he strove to realise one of the loftiest politico-social conceptions on record—that of establishing general peace on earth by quickening the noblest instincts of individuals and peoples at the first Hague Conference.

Every statement, every opinion that ran counter to this preconceived theory was thrust aside as malevolent or unfounded. Time and again I published facts that pulverised the accepted doctrine and ruined the conventional portrait, but the articles embodying these unorthodox views were either blamed as iconoclastic or wholly ignored, and more than once systematic efforts were put forth to have me punished by the Tsar's government for my temerity.

Doubtless the policies of Nicholas II. were numerous, and it was not always easy to reconcile one with the other. But they were all in keeping with the instincts of Tsarism or with the impulses and intuitions of its insignificant head, who did not always act with an intelligible aim and generally went to work without a measured forecast. The order of intelligence revealed by most of his international schemes differed nowise from that which was manifested in his relations with his ministers and courtiers. Most of these



designated it by the name of cunning. A noteworthy illustration of the policy, which likewise throws a strong light on the politician, occurred at the close of the year 1896. At that time the most brilliant, cultured, and easy-going of the Tsar's foreign secretaries was dead.<sup>1</sup> His successor, M. Shishkin, was one of those every-day bureaucrats who lived in a world of green tables, dusty parchments, sere and yellow leaves, and are termed by the French *ronds de cuir*. His intelligence was absorbed by memory, and his initiative paralysed by precedent. It was when this colourless official was acting-Minister of Foreign Affairs that an unqualifiable conspiracy against international troth and a menace to the peace of Europe was hatched by the Tsar and frustrated at the last minute by two statesmen of bitterly hostile camps, of whom each honestly regarded the other as a scourge of the Russian people. Witte and Pobiedonostseff alone in this environment joined hands to restrain Nicholas II. from an act which would probably have plunged Europe in war, and deserves to stand on record as one of the most damaging counts in the long indictment against Tsarism.

In that memorable year Russia's star was in the ascendant. For her prestige was incomparably greater than her power and her specific gravity enormously overrated by most State chancelleries. She easily overawed her rivals, all of whom took her at her own valuation. Witte, the Finance Minister, who had a representative of his own in every State department and who actually wielded much greater power than his imperial master, had just sown the seeds from which he might reasonably expect inexhaustible markets and a flourishing colony in the Far East. All that he now needed and asked for was peace and foreign money so that the Tsardom might continue to live on its prestige without being obliged actually to exercise its military strength.

Lobanoff during his short-lived activity had made perceptible progress and established his reputation. He had removed the soreness between the Tsardom and Bulgaria, struck up a political friendship with Ferdinand of Coburg,

<sup>1</sup> Lobanoff-Rostoffsky died suddenly in August, 1896.

bettered Russia's neighbourly relations with Austria-Hungary, and maintained in the northern Balkans her influence well-nigh intact. In the Far East also the Tsardom towered aloft like a giant among pigmies. Witte had torn up the treaty of Shimonoseki, deprived Japan of the fruits of her victory, imposed a ruinous friendship on the Chinese, and obtained the valuable concession for the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway.<sup>1</sup> Li Hung Chang was at the back of the all-powerful Russian Finance Minister, and Japan was disconsolate at the thought that Korea had been earmarked for the Tsardom. Witte handled the Orientals<sup>2</sup> deftly; some of their leaders he drove, others he lured into the penfold of "protected" peoples of whom the Tsar was the titular shepherd. All that he wanted for the success of his system was a firm economic foothold, industrial concessions, the laying of iron rails, and the forging of golden chains. Count Hayashi writes: "I could not do otherwise than admire his ability as a statesman. Had his programme been carried out, as he at first proposed, what would not have been the result?"<sup>3</sup> To my thinking the result would have been what it has since become, supremely disappointing. For do what he might the Tsarist State could not long survive into an era of law, collective effort, and responsibility. It was foredoomed to break up. I once likened it to the Bolognaphial of unannealed glass which may be flung to the ground, struck with a hammer, or heavily pressed without undergoing the least change, yet flies into thousands of little splinters if scratched with a diamond or a sharp flint. The surface of the phial, hard as crystal, holds fast the inner molecules, which tend to fly apart but keep together so long as the adamantine surface remains intact. And the surface of the Tsardom would have been scratched by the first

<sup>1</sup> September, 1896.

<sup>2</sup> It may not be superfluous to repeat what I said before: that I do not include the Japanese in these allusions to Eastern or Asiatic races. They stand in the forefront of civilised peoples of the world, and whatever changes may yet be in store for humanity, are practically certain to be among the most influential factors of ordered progress.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Secret Memoirs of Count Hayashi*, p. 94.

democratic institution and the molecules would have been scattered to the winds of heaven.

The Tsar's ambassador in Constantinople at the time of the story was M. Nelidoff, with whom I was well acquainted: an average, vigilant, ambitious diplomatist who managed, together with his German colleague there, to hit it off with the Sultan. In the previous year he had fought a fierce diplomatic battle against the British ambassador, Sir Philip Currie, on the subject of the Armenian massacres, after which their mutual relations remained strained. As already narrated, Queen Victoria's representative was persuaded that if the charges brought against the Sultan were proven by the international commission at Mush, diplomatic action of a drastic nature would follow as a matter of course. I had been authoritatively informed in advance that this was a gratuitous assumption, that nothing was further from the intentions of the Russian government, and that, whatever the merits of the question, the French cabinet, ever duly ductile, would follow the lead of its great ally. And that is what actually happened. A ridiculous tale was also spread in various parts of Central and Eastern Europe that the excitement over the Armenians had been designedly got up by English diplomacy in order to embarrass Russia. That falsehood was circulated and perhaps imagined by the Russian and German embassies in the Turkish capital. Prince Ukhtomsky's journal<sup>1</sup> wrote: "England threw obstacles in our path in China and Japan, in Chitral and Armenia, and now her conduct in Egypt is growing ever more hostile to Russia. The troubles created by Englishmen in the Armenian provinces of Turkey were planned in view of many objects, among others the establishment of direct communications over land between India and the Mediterranean."

<sup>1</sup> Ukhtomsky had travelled with Nicholas II. round the globe when that prince was heir-apparent, and the two were mistakenly supposed to be still on special terms of friendship. He was proprietor and editor of the oldest newspaper in St. Petersburg, the *St. Petersburg News* (*Vedomosti*), of the staff of which I had been a member in the days when it belonged to the Imperial Academy of Sciences and was edited by Komaroff.

It was believed, I do not know on what grounds, by well-informed statesmen that between the German and the Russian ambassadors in Constantinople something more than a mere harmony of views existed on the subject of Turkey's future. They were credited with preparing to play the part of fate. The former, it was asserted, had given the latter an assurance that if Russia were to look upon this coincidence of favourable circumstances as her long-desired opportunity to assert a claim which Germany had never contested, and force a free egress for her warships from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, she would encounter no opposition from the Kaiser's government, and might even reckon upon its diplomatic support. That was the kernel of the matter: no opposition and eventual diplomatic support.

In this scheme M. Nelidoff found room for patriotic duty and personal ambition. The despatches he sent home were described as insistent and suasive. He deemed the moment opportune, and the levers at his disposal adequate. He possessed the ear of Abdul Hamid, whose personal vagaries he had abstained from hindering or blaming and whose public policy he had steadily if secretly supported. In general outline his object was to get the Sultan to accept Russia's friendship, protection, guarantee of integrity, and to pay for these boons with two strips of territory and free egress from the Straits. And his method was the creation of an accomplished fact. It involved the seizure of the coveted territory on either shore of the Upper Bosphorus, and simultaneously heavy pressure put upon Abdul Hamid. The Russian fleet would effect the landing and the Russian ambassador would intimidate the Shadow of God.

To launch a thunderbolt of these dimensions among the pacific nations of Europe in the midst of profound peace and despite the most solemn treaties needed an aggregate of qualities and defects, intellectual and moral, which the reader can enumerate for himself.

The conspirators were well aware of the way in which their onslaught against Europeanism and morality would be

received by the opinion and sentiment of the world. But it was less this condemnation than the untoward consequences of premature disclosure that impelled them to keep the matter dark. Hence, not a single superfluous person was initiated into it. Herein one recognises the touch of the imperial hand. Nicholas II. was extremely secretive at the best of times. One never could tell what schemes he was turning over in his mind. He often lacked the courage to dismiss a minister fairly and squarely, and would continue to exhibit his pristine confidence in him and lead him to believe that he was indispensable, and then of a sudden would have a statement published in the official gazette acceding to the minister's "request to be allowed to resign on account of ill-health." But when he had something in hand which might, if discovered too soon, stir up national or international passion, he was as mute as a fish, and on occasion would adopt grotesque means of ensuring the maintenance of the secret, as he did in his behaviour towards the minister Birileff when conspiring with the Kaiser against his ally France at Björke. In the present case of the Nelidoff-Tshikhatshoff conspiracy the stakes were large. For if the Sultan should prove insensible to caresses and deaf to threats—as he certainly would if he got wind of the plot before its realisation—an armed conflict would be almost unavoidable, and it might be hard to confine it to Russia and Turkey. Besides, this new departure would entail a reversal of the system adopted by the Tsardom in its dealings with the East: to influence and control without actually annexing or threatening. It was well understood that England was the one power deeply interested in the strict preservation of the existing treaties relative to the Black Sea and the Straits, and it was assumed that a conflict with her might with Germany's help be averted.

To what extent the Kaiser's government was committed to the Russian ambassador I am unable to state for lack of evidence. My personal conviction is that if any such accord existed, which I strongly doubt, it had been made between the Kaiser and the Tsar. But so far as I now know the plan

was exclusively Russian. I vouch for the facts that the plan worked out by Nelidoff and Tshikhatshoff was approved by Nicholas II., that all the preparations for its execution were made, and that Witte with difficulty stifled the enterprise just when it was on the point of becoming an international revolution and an insolent challenge.

Contemplated from the point of view of Turkey's internal condition the conjuncture seemed favourable enough. The Ottoman Empire—a real Asiatic state in all its nakedness—was apparently tottering, and might at any moment go to pieces. Insurrections and risings among the Christians, massacres by the Kurds and Turks, discontent and sedition among the Mohammedan elements of the population, scarcity of money, national humiliations, all impressed Nelidoff as infallible tokens of the approaching end. At Zeitoun the Armenians had risen, made a determined stand against the troops, and were finally induced to surrender by the powers, who guaranteed an amnesty and the appointment of a Christian governor. A revolt had broken out among the Druses of the Hauran. In the district of Van a fresh outburst of religious and racial fanaticism had culminated in the violent deaths of many Turks and Armenians. The Christian Slavs of Macedonia had begun their guerilla warfare. In August, Constantinople became the scene of such bloodshed and cruelty as had not been witnessed there during the nineteenth century. For thirty hours the Mohammedan mob had the Armenians at their mercy and slaughtered about 2000 of them in the houses and streets. In short, Turkey was anarchy incarnate, and the powers felt that the least they could do would be to present a collective note to the Porte. This communication was drafted, delivered, ignored. Another concerted but really drastic measure was imminent, and it seemed as though in the natural course of things the last grain of Turkey's sands would soon have run down.

One day the Tsar learned from Nelidoff's despatches that his long-wished-for settlement of the Near Eastern difficulties was at last in sight and could be achieved if his ambas-

sador's plan of campaign were carried out immediately. Well pleased, he ordered Nelidoff to repair to Petersburg, and Admiral Tshikhathoff, then chief of the Odessa general staff, to visit the Turkish capital, and on the way to take stock of and report upon the strength of the fortifications of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles and draw up a plan for the military descent to be effected in the near future and under the conditions then prevailing. Carefully though these ongoings were hedged round with misleading statements, they did not pass wholly unnoticed; some foreigners alluded to them as ominous shadows of far-ranging events.

Nelidoff, on reaching the palace on the Singer's Bridge,<sup>1</sup> went over the whole ground with Shishkin, the Dryasdust of the Foreign Office. Shishkin informed him that the Emperor desired to have the subject clearly unfolded in writing, with all the advantages and drawbacks of the concrete scheme lucidly set forth so that the members of a very special council, which he would convene for the purpose, might have adequate data on which to rest their decision. The ambassador duly presented the memorandum.

That document existed down to the outbreak of the present war, and probably until the Bolshevik revolution. It may still exist to-day. It passed through the hands of Witte and others. I never actually saw it myself, but according to the description of it which was given to me by those who did, the preamble was devoted to a cursory description of the internal condition of the Ottoman Empire, of the growing ferment in the capital, of the anarchy in the provinces, and of the daily danger of a formidable insurrection. Nelidoff laid special stress on the Armenian question as an irritant and a dissolvent. At that moment it held Constantinople in a fever of excitement with intervals of panic. He had reason to apprehend that the Armenian revolutionists were hatching another plot which would infuriate the Mohammedans and cause a more fearful slaughter than any yet witnessed. Again, the Sultan might be deposed, and in this case popular riots, perhaps even mutiny among

<sup>1</sup> The Petersburg Foreign Office.

the troops, might ensue. Abdul Hamid could not be moved beforehand to take action calculated to dispel these dangers without creating others more redoubtable. He had no moral influence over the nation.

As for reforms, only a simpleton would build on them. The Porte could not carry them out, if it would, because they would rob the Turkish and Kurdish populations of their privileges, and as these Moslem peoples outnumber the Christians, they would oppose the application of the reforms tooth and nail. Force employed against the Mohammedans in order to conciliate the Christians would then remain the only alternative. And Abdul Hamid was too shrewd a statesman to commit such a blunder as to have recourse to force for such a purpose. M. Nelidoff averred that he fully believed in the seriousness of the threats uttered by the Armenians that they would rise in arms within a couple of months. In this case Europe would intervene. The six powers would put pressure on the Porte to have the reforms practically embodied in institutions. That might be satisfactory enough from the English point of view, but would it dovetail with Russia's vital interests? Nowise. Her security in the Black Sea and her communications with the Mediterranean would be forfeited for an indefinite span of time. And the more stable the order established by the powers in the Ottoman Empire, the more dismal the outlook of the Tsardom. Some other way out of the difficulty must be devised.

As the early intervention of the powers was thus practically certain, and fraught with danger, it behoved Russia to determine in what way she would protect herself against its consequences. Nelidoff held that it would not answer to allow the other states to send their warships before Constantinople—without taking precautionary measures in advance. What he had therefore to propose was that Russia should seize and keep a firm foothold on the shores of the Upper Bosphorus and wrest from the Sultan the freedom of the Straits. But the plans must be speedily drawn up and studied, and then carried out with the rapidity of a lightning



flash. The squadron and the men requisite for the descent should be got together and held in readiness to start at a moment's notice. He himself would give the signal in the form of a ciphered telegram addressed to Sebastopol. Then the vessels would cross the Black Sea, and before they entered the Bosphorus Nelidoff would have put the matter pressingly before the Sultan and asked him to allow the ships to pass and the men to take possession of the heights on condition that the interests of the Ottoman Empire would be well looked after. If he refused, he must be prepared for the consequences. At the same time the other powers would also receive information of what was being done, and an invitation to come to the Dardanelles if they felt so disposed. Should they avail themselves of this invitation, the Russian Mediterranean squadron would accompany them. And if they landed troops anywhere, the Russian commander would follow their example. In this way the Tsardom would have two irons in the fire to one of the other powers.

The abiding consequence of all this would, in the eyes of the ambassador, be the permanent occupation by Russia of the Upper Bosphorus and the neutralisation of the Dardanelles, which would be thrown open to the warships of all nations. The suddenness of Russia's action would be justified by her natural apprehensions for the security of her subjects and her want of confidence in the good-will and power of the Porte. Nelidoff was very careful to reiterate and emphasise his belief that not one of the other powers would venture to offer opposition to the proposed seizure of territory. Consequently Russia could establish herself permanently on the Upper Bosphorus and create a Near Eastern Gibraltar there. That done she might take part with an easy mind in the international council that would fix the destiny of Turkey. That in outline was the gist of the *exposé*.

Such was the machination imagined by Nelidoff and the Tsar. It would be interesting to know how his recent chief, Lobanoff-Rostoffsky, would have regarded it were he still living. But M. Shishkin, who had never displayed the least initiative, listened approvingly and took the needful measures

to have the special council convened. This body resembled all such tribunals formed by the Tsar in this, that it consisted of members with whose approval he could reckon in advance. Whenever Nicholas II. wanted to have a pet scheme of his own stamped with the hall-mark of relative legality he submitted it to the judgment of a few officials who were certain to make it their own. It was thus that he had gone to work in dealing with the various questions that cropped up in connection with Korea, Manchuria, China, Japan, Persia, Afghanistan, and Germany. And in this case he conformed to the same rule.

It was in the early days of December, 1896, that the special council met to talk over the scheme propounded by Nelidoff. Probably no such body had ever deliberated with greater secrecy during the reign of Nicholas II. Even the Tsar's *alter ego*, Pobiedonostseff, was kept in complete ignorance of what was going on. For some days four or five persons had the fate of the Turkish Empire, and perhaps the peace of Europe, in their power, and they came to a decision unfavourable to both. For the secret council with one dissentient voice commended the brilliant idea propounded by the Tsar's ambassador. It also authorised him to gauge the situation in Constantinople and to give the signal for the descent on the shores of the Bosphorus as soon as the opportune moment should arrive. The Emperor unhesitatingly ratified the recommendation of his loyal council, and the technical part of the scheme was elaborated at once. Shortly before returning to his post, M. Nelidoff received further instructions, and contact between himself and Admiral Tshikhatshoff was made closer and continuous, for the realisation of the plan was confidently expected to be accomplished by the new year. From this time forward all power was vested in the Russian ambassador. Whenever he gave the signal everything else would follow automatically, so to say.

Time pressed. The danger to Europe was imminent. But of that none of the conspirators recked. What was much more serious was the effect of the plot on Russia herself. It would undo Witte's slowly elaborated scheme of pacific

penetration, open the door to foreign competition—diplomatic, economic, and, what was far worse, military. For if Russia had to make good on the battle-field the influence she was arrogating to herself in the council chamber, she would quickly sink to the low level of her own specific gravity. Of these consequences Witte was painfully aware, and he was quite ready to protest as energetically as he knew how. But that was not enough. He had already done all that an influential minister could effect single-handed, and it fell far short of what was needed. All that he could still undertake was to enlist the support of his personal adversary, Pobiedonostseff, and induce him to awaken the Emperor to a sense of the enormity he was about to perpetrate. Smothering his personal aversion as he so well knew how, Witte called on his implacable enemy, the Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synod, and put the matter plainly before him, appealing to his patriotism and sense of duty to Russia and the Tsar. Pobiedonostseff was astounded. He had heard nothing of the goings on of Nelidoff, Tshikhatshoff, and Shishkin. He could hardly believe these officials so utterly devoid of political sense and so incapable of discerning the mischief they were about to inflict on their own country. He acknowledged, however, that in view of such a mad scheme Witte's fears were well founded and his unusual action justified. He would see the Emperor without delay and leave nothing undone to have the plot frustrated.

Repairing to Tsarskoye Selo, he laid the matter before the Tsar who, naturally enough, conjectured that the Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synod had received his information from Witte. And this act was mentally filed among the counts of the indictment against the Finance Minister. Pobiedonostseff's disinterestedness and patriotism were known to the Emperor. He was a thoroughly honest man, dry, pedantic, and incorruptible. His motives, therefore, were above suspicion. And he succeeded in setting the scheme and its effects upon the Tsar, the dynasty, and the Russian State in such a forbidding perspective that before he left the palace the monarch suspended the decision and

withdrew the powers of independent action with which Nelidoff was invested. Thus the imminence of the danger was displaced owing to the timely intervention of Witte and Pobiedonostseff.

But the Black Sea Squadron and the men told off to occupy the heights of the Upper Bosphorus were kept in readiness from that day onward until the outbreak of the war against Japan absorbed all the warships and fighting men available. Thus from the year 1896 to 1904 the naval and military contingents and all the accessories of the expedition remained in evidence awaiting an opportunity to play their part in realising that criminal plan.

### *The Story of Kiao Chow*

Truth and loyalty were so often eschewed in these transactions that the historian who is acquainted with the subject takes their absence as a matter of course. At the close of the Chino-Japanese campaign, immediately after the treaty of Shimonoseki became known, another illuminating instance of unscrupulous dealing occurred in which, however, as the Russian saying puts it, the scythe came upon the rock, and Germany received a coin from her own mint. Witte told me that the idea of depriving Japan of the main fruits of her victory had sprung up in his own brain and was executed without opposition because, although he was only Minister of Finances at the time, his influence over all Russia's public business was still paramount.<sup>1</sup> By the Shimonoseki treaty Japan obtained Chinese territory on the mainland, and this was destructive of Witte's scheme of peaceful penetration, which pre-supposed the integrity of China. Accordingly he requested Germany and France to join him in compelling the Tokio government to let go of its foothold there. Germany regarded the arrangements as a business transaction and was determined to charge both China and Russia a reasonable price for the service rendered. When, therefore,

<sup>1</sup> Count Lobanoff-Rostoffsky acknowledged this to every one who had a right to talk to him on the subject. He said so quite plainly to the British ambassador at St. Petersburg, Sir Nicholas O'Connor.

the Tsar's government contemplated the opening of a Russo-Chinese bank, which, it was anticipated, would acquire the control of the principal economic and financial resources of the Celestial Empire, Germany insisted on going halves with her neighbour and supplying a proportionate part of the capital. Negotiations were consequently opened with the Russian Foreign Office which gave the proposals its "careful and favourable consideration." But while terms were being solemnly discussed between Petersburg and Berlin and suasion was apparently making a breach in Russia's opposition, it was suddenly announced that the Russian Ministry of Finances had on its own initiative furnished the entire capital and was no longer open to any offers on the subject. That was one of the results of the "autonomy" of the State departments. The Foreign Office was not, of course, responsible for thus leaving Germany out in the cold; with finances Count Lamsdorff had nothing to do, and against an accomplished fact there was no appeal. That was the gist of the explanations given. But the German government was not to be thus cheaply fed on fiction. It was resolved to bide its time and have its innings before the match was over. And the "leasing" of Kiao Chow was the result. Driven from the open gate of diplomacy it sought and found an entrance at another door.

Parenthetically it may not be amiss to reproduce here the broad lines of Witte's policy in the Far East. He and I talked it over many a time and I have numerous pages which I wrote at his dictation, "for the purpose," he said, "of vindicating me one day should that be necessary." This then is how he once summarised his aims:

"What I have ever striven for is to create and preserve conditions favourable to the pacific development of Russia. That is and was my central aim. Within the fairly broad limits which it connotes, there would have been ample room for our expansion especially in the Far East. And as you know, I had my eyes fixed on China. But I was determined that, so far as it depended on me, there should be no violence, no annexation, nothing to provoke the resentment or arouse

the misgivings of the Chinese, and everything possible to draw their sympathy and co-operation. Russia was to be their friend—their intimate and privileged friend—but that is all. And owing to the place which she occupied and the prestige she enjoyed among the nations, her paramount position in the Far East, which was obtained gradually, could have been upheld pacifically. But on no account did I wish her to risk having to face the necessity of making good in war the exaggerated estimate of her military strength. This general conclusion, but not the specific ground for it, I often laid before Nicholas II.

“Well, all these plans and combinations were suddenly knocked on the head by the Emperor’s wilfulness or shyness. As soon as I learned the contents of the Chino-Japanese Treaty of Shimonoseki, I sought him out and told him that we must never recognize it, unless we were prepared to face a war or abandon the markets of the Far East. ‘We cannot,’ I went on, ‘allow Japan to quit her islands and get a firm foothold on the mainland. If we do, we shall have wrecked all that has been accomplished and the still greater things that are yet to be achieved by the grandiose efforts made by your revered father. I gave a promise to Li Hung Chang that your Majesty would not permit Japan to keep Liaotung even if she obtained it by treaty, and China relies upon you to fulfil that plighted word. I am the first to proclaim the necessity of redeeming all our promises to Japan and of making all reasonable concessions to her needs and aspirations, but we cannot brook the seizure of any part of China. We have to stand for the principle of China’s integrity just as firmly as the United States stand for the Monroe doctrine. And what is more, we ourselves must respect China’s integrity.’ The Emperor looked somewhat scared and said, ‘But don’t you think that if we lay plans to have the treaty changed now, Japan will grow desperate and declare war?’ ‘No, sire, Japan will not declare war, were it only because that is materially impossible. She lacks the wherewithal to-day, and later on we can square her if she becomes restive.’

“Thereupon the Emperor asked me how I proposed to

set the wheels of diplomacy in motion. I told him I would invite Germany and France to join us and that I had no reason to fear a refusal on their part. Then he gave his assent and added his 'most cordial thanks,' which he reiterated with increased warmth when the crisis was over and the aim achieved. On each of these occasions I said to him, 'We must of course play quite fair in all this and respect the integrity which we are upholding, and resolved to uphold, against all who would violate it.' And the Tsar assented.

"I then arranged the concerted move of Germany, France, and Russia. This made me feel quite sure of success. It also served as an unmistakable intimation to all the great powers that Russia considered the integrity of China as the ground work of her Far Eastern policy, and would not allow it to be tampered with; and it also encouraged me to think that by accustoming all three governments to combine for European or world objects, I was gradually preparing them for a closer and less transitory alliance in the future. This last consideration, however, was a dream rather than a 'plank' in my political programme. What happened after that and how the Treaty of Shimonoseki was declared null and void you know.<sup>1</sup> What you don't yet know is at least equally thrilling.

"One fateful day, when Kaiser Wilhelm was on a visit here, the devil threw temptation in the way of the Tsar who succumbed to it as he has done more than once since then. Much water has flowed under the Palace Bridge since that episode. It was on his first visit to Russia after Nicholas' accession to the throne. The two potentates were driving in an open carriage from a review, I think at Peterhof or Tsarskoye Selo—I forget which. I did not hear a word about what passed at the time until the consequences became manifest, and then it was recounted to me somewhat in this way.<sup>2</sup> In the course of conversation with Nicholas the Kaiser suddenly broke away from the ordinary topics and exclaimed, 'I want you to do me a favour. You are in the

<sup>1</sup> Japan was constrained to retrocede the Liaotung Peninsula in return for an indemnity of thirty million taels.

<sup>2</sup> The Tsar himself told the story to several of the grand dukes.

happy position of being able to help your friends as well as to punish your enemies. As you know, I am badly in need of a port. My fleet has no place worthy of the name outside my Empire. And why should it be debarred? That may, perhaps, serve the purposes of our covert enemies, but not Russia's. And I know your friendly sentiment towards me and my dynasty. I want you now to say frankly, have you any objection to my leasing Kiao Chow in China?' 'What name did you say?' 'Kiao Chow.' 'No—none. I see no objection whatever.' The Kaiser thanked his host profusely and the imperial pair drove to the palace. The head of the Foreign Department was Muravieff, the most ignorant and least cultured of all Russia's Foreign Ministers in the course of the nineteenth century. He had obtained the post solely because, when passing through Copenhagen, which was the stepping stone to the palace at the Singer's Bridge,<sup>1</sup> he displayed the faculty of making a certain class of people of doubtful taste laugh at his farcical jokes told with somewhat grotesque gestures. He had the temperament of the clown. Muravieff probably had never before heard of Kiao Chow<sup>2</sup> and knew no reason which would militate against its being leased to Germany, and like other and more gifted ministers, he refrained from asking those who knew. But that is of no importance, as you shall hear later.

"A few hours afterwards the Emperor met the Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovitch who knew a good deal about sea-ports and their value, and about naval matters generally. The Tsar said, 'I feel put out with the Kaiser. To-day he has tricked me into consenting to let him have Kiao Chow. Of course it is not downright annexation that he aims at. He is only going to lease it. All the same, it is a nasty trick.' 'You have not given him your consent in writing?' 'No, no. Only in words. We were in the carriage driving.' 'But surely you can withdraw from that one-sided arrangement all the more that it would put us into a very embarrass-

<sup>1</sup> The Russian Foreign Office.

<sup>2</sup> When negotiating with a British diplomatist Muravieff confounded Dairen (Dalny) and Port Arthur, and the result was a very unpleasant quarrel. Of geography the Foreign Secretary had not an inkling



ing position.' 'No, no, I have given my word and I cannot back out. It is most vexing.' Wilhelm then returned to Berlin and despatched a squadron to the Far East to obtain satisfaction for the murder of a couple of German missionaries which had been committed there. He demanded amends and his warships having entered the port he refused to withdraw them.

"Thereupon a council was convoked in Petersburg under Muravieff. After some preliminary expressions of opinion Muravieff, calling to mind a warning of mine against allowing any power to occupy Chinese territory, moved that Port Arthur should be taken by us as a set-off against Kiao Chow. I at once opposed the notion vehemently. For I resented both the remedy and the folly that had rendered a remedy necessary. I said, 'We should immediately adopt one of two courses: acquiesce in what has been done and abide by the consequences or else insist on Germany's withdrawal from Kiao Chow and take our stand on the ground of the integrity of China. There is no third way out of the difficulty—at least none that I can approve. I certainly cannot perceive the logic of seizing Port Arthur as an answer to the leasing of Kiao Chow. Are we not on good terms with China? Why spoil these relations? Have we not a treaty with China? Why violate it? If we take either of these courses we put ourselves in the wrong. But if we decide to advise Germany to quit or else fight her, we should have reason and morality on the side of our political and economic interests, and I feel convinced that she would give way.'

"I think the members of the council were impressed, for they passed a resolution that Port Arthur should not be taken. I myself drew up the minutes of that sitting and, what is more, the resolution was approved by the Tsar. I breathed freely again, for I had had misgivings about his attitude. Now he dispelled them entirely. But a few days later, to our amazement our common friend Admiral Dubasoff entered Port Arthur.<sup>1</sup> I was furious. This slyness and double dealing irritated me. I at once sought out the Tsar

<sup>1</sup> Dubasoff himself told me the outlines of the story afterwards. Port Arthur was leased to Russia by a deed signed on 9th April, 1898.

and showed him that I felt very keenly what had happened, because I had worked so long and so hard on lines incompatible with the policy on which he was now launching out and the results of this policy were now endangered. In conclusion I said, 'The council decided not to take Port Arthur and your Majesty ratified the decision of the council.' The Tsar replied, 'Yes, but are you aware that an English squadron was about to take the port and that the only alternatives open to us were to abandon it to the English or else to go back on the decision of the council and take it ourselves? It was not until the Minister of Foreign Affairs told me this that I gave my assent to his proposal. In my place you would have done the same.'

"I ought to have said that from the council I went straight to the German Embassy. Von Tschirschky was there instead of Radolin. I said, 'When Kaiser Wilhelm was last here, he was very gracious towards me and authorised me to appeal to him direct if ever I wanted anything. Well, now I do want badly to petition him for a great favour. He is taking Kiao Chow. I know he wants to chastise certain Chinese criminals and to mete out punishment for their crimes. This is a most legitimate desire. I sympathise with him. If he were to call for the heads of a hundred or a thousand Chinamen I would not say a word. But if his Majesty takes a Chinese port, Russia will be constrained to do likewise although nothing would be more distasteful to her. Will you kindly telegraph in cipher what I have just said, so that the Kaiser may see it at once?' Von Tschirschky promised. The telegram was duly sent to Von Bülow who laid it before the Emperor. A few days later Von Tschirschky called on me and said, 'His Majesty the Kaiser thanks you very warmly for your frank *exposé* and wishes me to say that from the wording of your message he concludes with some surprise that certain important conditions governing this matter of Kiao Chow are unknown to you.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The supposition to which the late Count Hayashi gave circulation, that a secret agreement existed all along between Germany and Russia about Kiao Chow and Port Arthur, is, so far as I know, groundless. I can state positively that neither Witte nor Muravieff nor Lamsdorff knew anything about it, and it runs counter to several well-established facts.

"I was unspeakably angry with Muravieff and I made no secret of my feelings towards him. Noticing this he spontaneously offered me explanations. He said, 'I should like you to bear in mind that this business was not inaugurated yesterday nor to-day. It was during the Kaiser's *first* visit here that he received the Tsar's consent to lease Kiao Chow, and on his return to Berlin he got the people of the Wilhelmstrasse to formulate the one-sided arrangement and to transmit it at the fitting moment to our Foreign Office. The whole scheme was the handiwork of the Kaiser or, if you like, of the two monarchs. So please don't blame me. I have enough to answer for without that.' I rejoined that I accepted the explanation which I did not know before, and then I insisted, 'That is all very well for Kiao Chow. I can see that you had no voice in that matter at all and are not therefore blameworthy. But surely, surely, you could and should have hindered the seizure of Port Arthur. Not to have vetoed that piece of folly was a grave omission for which I cannot but blame you. And history will be more severe towards you than I can ever be.' 'But, my dear Serghei Yulievitch,' he shouted, 'you have missed the point of what I have just been telling you. Please understand that the taking of Port Arthur was none of my doing. Let me impress on you the fact—you may think what you like of it, but it is the fact—that his Majesty had arranged everything—Kiao Chow and Port Arthur—long ago when he acquiesced in the proposals of the Kaiser. That was the fruit of Wilhelm's first visit to Russia. As for me, I was not of course consulted and knew absolutely nothing about it. The seizure of Port Arthur was the direct consequence of the leasing of Kiao Chow. And it was entirely an imperial deal. Is the matter clear now?'<sup>1</sup> It was clear and made much else clear. I

<sup>1</sup> It would be unfair to pass over in silence another story which is absolutely authenticated and which casts a doubt on Muravieff's plea of justification. He met the Russian minister to Hesse at Darmstadt soon afterwards and boasted he had had his way about Port Arthur in spite of the omnipotent Witte, and he added: "Things are not, however, going as I hoped they would. My intention was not to fortify Port Arthur, but only to hoist the Russian flag over it and leave a sentry in a sentry box

trembled for Russia's future when looking back upon her recent past. I could hardly realise that the young Tsar, with no experience, little reading, and only modest intellectual gifts, should have launched forth into acts of that magnitude almost before he had taken stock of his Empire or realised the duties which its governance imposed. As for Muravieff, one could never believe anything he said, unless it was confirmed by trustworthy evidence. In this case confirmation was forthcoming."

To-day we are better able to estimate the effect of that personal intervention in momentous affairs of State which was one of the most baleful and least known characteristics of the last Emperor's reign. As the result of a sudden mood, in answer to a sweetly uttered request, or by way of realising the wish of a near relation, he would make a sudden descent into the statesman's workshop and by the graceful waving of his hand tear the web of the deftest combinations into shreds. The further we penetrate into the archives of Russia's foreign policy, even during the enlightened period which extends over the last two reigns, the more irresistibly are we forced to admit that the root principles which presided over the foundation of the Tsarist State and determined its predatory character remained active and vigorous to the very last. We may judge Nicholas II. as severely as we please, but we cannot deny that however puerile or preposterous some of his methods may have been, his aims dovetailed with the tendencies that never ceased to accompany the political activity of the Tsardom. In the nineteenth century there were two predatory powers in Europe, Germany and Russia, and the latter was still a clumsy theocracy from which law as a real restraint, religion as an emanation of the individual conscience, education as a State function, and social co-operation as a means of latter-day progress had not disengaged themselves.

to guard it. Nothing more." But Muravieff was one of those misers who grudge the truth to everybody. To a foreign diplomatist who hinted that he had not spoken his thought to the British government in the matter of Port Arthur he answered, "Perhaps not—but I gained a fine port for Russia thereby."

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE LAST STATESMEN OF THE TSARDOM

THOSE who still imagine that individuals rather than the character of the Tsarist State were responsible for those predatory habits and the uniform bad faith which so long rendered a trustworthy covenant between Russia and any other government virtually impossible, would do well to remember that, however widely individual ministers might differ from each other, the system invariably over-ruled the best intentions and vitiated the most straightforward conduct of the statesman in charge. Thus Count Lamsdorff was known to be a loyal and veracious man, of whom it could be predicated that his assertions were true and his promises sincere. But the former were always liable to be belied and the latter to be violated by his master or his colleagues. And he could not legally resign because the theory, in the Tsardom, to which the practice inflexibly conformed was that a minister is a civil officer whose commander-in-chief is the Emperor and that without the Emperor's permission—or in other words until he is dismissed from office—he may not lay down his functions.

Lamsdorff was an admirable Foreign Secretary, through whose hands all the important State papers and into whose ears all the momentous State secrets passed. He had served under Giers who often consulted him, and under Lobanoff-Rostoffsky and Shishkin. During Muravieff's tenure of office he held the post of assistant minister. By them all he was noted as a discreet, steady, hard-working, conscientious official, whose thorough knowledge of French and extraordinary habits of seclusion—Lamsdorff never married—rendered him incomparably more useful than any of his colleagues. On Muravieff's sudden death the Emperor seemed inclined to give the succession to Izvolsky, who was then Minister in Tokio, but had been in somewhat strained

relations with the Russian Foreign Office. It appears that when the famous invitation to all the governments of the earth to meet at the Hague was sent out by the Tsar under peculiar circumstances which will be unfolded in a later chapter, the Foreign Minister, Muravieff, wrote to his cousin Izvolsky, then minister in Munich, to ask him how the grandiose idea was received by the Bavarians. Izvolsky—who can, I am sure, bear out what I say—knew perfectly that the Hague Conference appeal was a shameful fraud which Muravieff and the Tsar were practising on the world, and he refused to humour the vulgar trickster by feigning to become ecstatic. He had the cruel frankness, therefore, to throw cold water on Muravieff's sudden fervour and to apprise him that in Bavaria the summons had been warmly acclaimed only by hysterical women, Jews, and Socialists. That response was resented by the vainglorious minister, who soon afterwards transferred his cousin from Munich to the Far East. M. Izvolsky, when he reached Yokohama, on his way to Tokio, learned that Muravieff was dead. And the Tsar at once turned his eyes towards Izvolsky, but did not wish to create an accomplished fact without first consulting Witte, who was very keen to have a colleague in the Foreign Office with whom he could work in harmony.

The great statesman, whose judgment of others was often at fault, had a higher opinion of M. Izvolsky's personal independence than of his statecraft and, what at that time was much more to the point, he was extremely anxious that Lamsdorff should take over the post, because he himself would then, he believed, be able to exert a general directing influence over the entire business of the Tsardom. As a matter of fact Izvolsky would have served his purpose better than Lamsdorff, because being independent he would not have tolerated, as Lamsdorff did, the formation of a secret governing board of adventurers behind his back, who plunged the Empire into war. He would doubtless have resigned or else obliged the Tsar to dismiss Bezobrazoff and his confederates. Witte contrived to have devoted agents of his own in the Ministries of War, the Marine, Justice, Edu-

cation, Railways, at court, in a word he possessed a powerful lever for every State department. And what is much more characteristic of the man, he had a small fleet of his own, a railway of his own, an army of his own of which he was the commander-in-chief, and he wanted to have Manchuria as his own domain. He built his own city Dalny and lavished enormous sums on laying it out. Disposing of all these means of influencing the government, Witte fancied that he could effectively hinder war and carry out his own scheme of governance by speedy industrialisation, railway building, technical and general education, and gradual political reforms. This, then, was the answer which he returned to the Tsar:

"If your Majesty desires a society man who is also an official of experience I would suggest Count Delyanoff,<sup>1</sup> but if you prefer to have a diplomatist, I think you will find no one as well fitted for the post as Count Lamsdorff. He is an animated archive of State documents. His drawbacks are an unconquerable aversion to society and all that this implies, so that he will not be a dispenser of hospitality, but even that drawback has ample compensations."

Thereupon Lamsdorff was made minister, and from that day onward he and Witte worked in rare harmony, the latter being invariably consulted on all questions involving important international issues. Here then were the two most influential ministers in the Empire, at one on the Far Eastern problem and how to tackle it, both resolved to do everything in their power—Witte alone was thought to be all-powerful—to hinder war, and yet the insignificant, untrained youth who occupied the throne frustrated their every effort with the utmost ease. To such a degree was the Tsarist State true to its nature. One difference between Witte and Lamsdorff consisted in the manner in which they conceived their functions. Lamsdorff was wont to say, "I endeavour to form a sound opinion on each of

<sup>1</sup> A Russianised Armenian, shallow, snobbish, and time-saving. He was my chief when I occupied the Chair of Comparative Philology at the University of Kharkoff, but I had known him through Kossowicz and Philippoff many years before, when he occupied the post of Director of the Imperial Library.

the problems that are become or becoming actual and to seek for a solution. I then lay my view before the Emperor as lucidly and also as forcibly as I know how. And there my duty terminates. For is the Tsar not an absolute monarch? How and why then should I insist? Why ought I to resign merely because I differ from him? It is my duty to stay on and render him such services as he will accept." Witte, on the other hand, was always insistent and often dogmatic. He not only advised but drew on the future for deterrents with which he strove to frighten the Tsar, and his mode of carrying on a discussion was the reverse of courtly. Only about one political question had the two friends ever differed, and that was on the subject of Port Arthur. When it became urgent Lamsdorff, who was only assistant Foreign Secretary, held the same view as his chief, Muravieff, and was opposed to the Minister of Finances. Subsequently Witte taunted him with his mistake and pointed out the pernicious consequences that had resulted from it, but Lamsdorff answered, "I grant you it was an unwise step, and if I had to deal with the subject in the light of what I now know, I would certainly take sides with you. But I cannot admit that it led to war with Japan. This war was brought about by our impolitic endeavours to grab Manchuria and Korea."

But do what they might, honest, clear-sighted, and even genial political spirits made no deep dent on the Tsarist State. Witte with his ideal of peace resting upon economic revival, growing industries, larger markets, educational advance, and political training had just as little success as Izvolsky, who boldly started from the assumption that Russia was already a European community and that her policy, home and foreign, ought to be shaped in accordance with that—the nationalities being placated at home by reasonable concessions in the direction of autonomy, and the international intercourse of the Tsardom regulated in an equally liberal sense by removing all causes of friction between Russia and her neighbours and by striking up understandings with the progressive nations of the world. The Tsardom



remained to the end what it had been from the first: a predatory community, and, as the schoolmen used to put it, its action was congruous with its nature.

When writing and working to bring about an Anglo-Russian Entente, I took pains to set these facts candidly before the British public in a series of review articles,<sup>1</sup> and among other expressions of my opinion, which events have since confirmed, I stated that Russia's policy "is the resultant of conditions of which some elude analysis, most are bound up with her internal structure, and all are proof against diplomatic reagents." . . .<sup>2</sup> For knowing the men who successively presided over the Foreign Office I could not ascribe to them, but only to the mechanism which they kept going, the pertinacity of the assaults they made upon the foundations of the European political system and upon such ethical postulates as are commonly supposed to militate in favour of its maintenance. In the space of two years the Tsar's government twice deliberately hoodwinked the British Foreign Office by means of the illustory hope of an all-round settlement; the Foreign Minister, Lobanoff, availed himself of a period of profound peace to organise a coalition of the great powers against Great Britain, offering Egypt to France and seeking to bribe Spain with Gibraltar; the war minister, Kuropatkin, was once on the very point of taking Herat, fighting the Afghans, and challenging their British protectors, at another time he laid a trap to seize the persons of the Emperor and Dowager Empress of China; the acting minister, Shishkin, in obedience to an imperial decree, was about to seize Constantinople and cut the Gordian knot of the Near Eastern Question without a word of warning to her Majesty's government; in January, 1904, war with Great Britain was in sight, and in the summer of the same year the littoral of the Baltic was hurriedly protected against British warships, and arrangements in Turkestan were made for an eventual campaign against India.

Thus the aggressive attitude of the Tsardom towards the

<sup>1</sup> Cf., for instance, the article entitled "The Obstacles to an Anglo-Russian Convention," *Contemporary Review*, June and July, 1904.

<sup>2</sup> *Contemporary Review*, July, 1904, p. 41.

European family of nations was seen to be a link in the chain of politico-psychic necessity forged by its founders. It was the resultant of a clearly defined set of conditions, not the creation of the brain of a far-seeing statesman. Those who fancied that Russia's diplomacy was uncommonly sagacious, planning ages ahead the moves which would be made by remote posterity, and crediting Peter the Great with what was really the work of happy accident or the temporary success of shifty ministers, mistook a popular legend for an historical fact. The truth is that, like most other countries, Russia possessed many diplomatists and very few statesmen, but, unlike them, she advanced along certain unchanging lines of action whoever might happen to be at the head of affairs. It was an instance of *vis inertiae*. For her policy was traced by internal conditions, one of which moved her to withdraw her main forces, moral and material, from the heart of the Empire to its extremities. I gave frequent expression to this conviction in bygone times. "Territorial expansion," I wrote, "and not internal development is the law which still shapes her course to-day. Hence the State grows in extent while the well-being of the people remains stationary. The government therefore is very wealthy, but the people exceedingly poor. The State is ever annexing territory, while the peasants complain that they lack soil to till. The bulky bags of gold are lavishly spent in Korea, Manchuria, and the uttermost ends of the globe, while the *mooshik* feels the pinch of poverty. In a word, the pent-up energy of the nation runs along the line of least resistance, which is that of territorial expansion, and every general, admiral, ambassador, and consul knows that he may safely try to score a point in that direction. For if he succeed he will have merited well of his government, and if he fail he will be promptly disavowed.

"One of the practical consequences of this state of things is that the Russian nation appears to the outsider as an agglomeration of distinct and hostile races, religions, and interests, which have never been blended, and are loosely linked together by obedience to one and the same head.

Hence the individual lacks not indeed patriotism, but that particular and inspiring form of it which is engendered by the consciousness that the State is to some extent, however small, the work of his own hands. Thus the Armenian, the Pole, the Finn, the Hebrew, does not feel himself a Russian in the same sense in which his compatriot in the United States feels himself an American. He is an Armenian or a Pole first and a Russian afterwards. Even the real Russian does not identify himself with the State, which grows rich at his expense and pursues ideals after which he himself has no desire to strive.

"Now to merge all these heterogeneous elements in one great nation, as the Americans have done, is an arduous task, to be successfully tackled only by means from which the government instinctively recoils. For such a change presupposes the repeal not only of such special legislation as at present exists for the different nationalities, Poles, Caucasians, Jews, Finns, etc., but also the removal of class privileges and disabilities, the spread of elementary, secondary, and technical education, and the introduction of other reforms which are eschewed as incompatible with the present political fabric. All the surplus activity of the population, therefore, as well as a large part of its financial resources, is diverted into other channels and utilised for the benefit of Manchus, Koreans, and other peoples who are neither Russian nor Christian. The purely mechanical attempts at assimilation, such as those which are associated with the names of General Bobrikoff in Finland and Prince Galitzin in the Caucasus, have hitherto produced only negative results, estranging and embittering instead of conciliating and uniting. Thus the Finns are less Russian in sentiment to-day than they were a quarter of a century ago. The Armenians, who were once regarded as zealous apostles of the cause of the Christian Slav in Asia Minor, are deeply distrusted by official Russia at present. And every new war renders it more and more difficult to reduce the motley elements of the population to a common denominator."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Contemporary Review*, July, 1904, p. 45.

How utterly unavailing were the endeavours, not always systematic, of Russia's genial statesman, Witte, to harmonise the Asiatic spirit of the old and unchanging Tsardom with the economic necessities and ethical tendencies of the new epoch, and to draw its peoples within the pale of European culture, is brought home to us with irresistible force in the government's dealings with the Far Eastern States. The outward and visible sign of the interest taken by the Petersburg government in the destinies of those remote countries was the resolve to treat the project of the Trans-Siberian railways as vital, to build the line within a relatively short period, and take it through Manchuria. This was Witte's scheme, for which he soon obtained the approval of Alexander III. The next link in the chain that was to connect the interests of these two aggregates of peoples was an understanding with China. The conversations that led to it were conducted by the Russian statesman with the display of all the means that strike the imagination and paralyse the reasoning powers of the Asiatic. The history of this bargaining is an epitome of the relations, cultural and political, between the two. The shrewd, epigrammatic, old-world sayings of the great Manchu leader, who was drawn to Russia by golden chains and hypnotised by fascinating spectres, contrasted with the bold, business-like language of the illustrious Russian. Although the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time was the highly gifted *causeur* Lobanoff-Rostoffsky, whom I had known in Vienna, it was the bluff Finance Minister who carried on the conversations.

In his secret dispatches from Russia to the Tsung Li Yamen<sup>1</sup> of Peking, Li Hung Chang put the matter very simply before his government and sovereign. Here is one telegram of his which was given to me soon after it had been deciphered: "I received a visit<sup>2</sup> from the Russian Finance Minister, Witte, who developed his views on the subject of the Manchurian railway and the route which, in his opinion,

<sup>1</sup> The Chinese equivalent of our Foreign Office.

<sup>2</sup> On 21st April, 1896 (old style).

had better be chosen on the score of cheapness and expediency. Once built, he said, it would lessen the danger to be apprehended from Japan, but China ought not to be charged with its construction, because it would take her fully ten years. I objected that if the choice of a company were left to Russia she would construct it herself, and that a precedent would be created for other powers to follow. He answered that if we dissented China would never make the railway, and that in any case Russia is minded to extend her line to Nipchu, and then await a favourable moment, but that she could not renew her offer to help China. This view is Witte's, but his ability is made much of by the Tsar. Lobanoff, whom I have met on two occasions, has never broached this subject."

The next telegram is dated three days later and runs thus: "When an ambassador has once presented his credentials it is not usual for him to receive a second audience. Yet the Tsar has received me again in his private apartment, my son, Li Chung Fang, being the only person present. The pretext was his Majesty's wish to take over the presents. And this is what he said, 'Russia owns vast territories which are but thinly populated. Therefore she will not trespass upon a foot of soil which is the property of others. Moreover, the ties which bind her to China are very intimate. Hence her only motive in desiring the junction of the railways through Manchuria is the quick conveyance of troops for the purpose of affording effectual help to China whenever the latter country is hard set. Consequently, it is not for Russia's advantage alone that the line would serve. On the other hand, China's resources are not sufficient to enable her to build the railway. If she handed over the building concession to the Russo-Chinese Bank at Shanghai, safeguarding her right of control by means of suitable stipulations, no difficulties need be anticipated. Such things are done in every country.' For those reasons the Tsar requested me to weigh well the proposals, and to adopt practical means to realise them. *He added that China could not be sure that England and Japan would not brew trouble for*

*her very soon, but she could at least enable Russia to come to her assistance.*<sup>1</sup> In the execution of my duty, I report those words for the information of the crown."

*Li Hung Chang to the Tsung Li Yamen*

"27th April, 1896 (old style).

"Lobanoff invited me to dine with him yesterday, and I met Witte there. The building of the railway was put forward by both ministers as a matter of extreme moment. Witte maintained that it could be constructed in three years. I urged that there were obstacles in the way, but he answered that he would obviate them by putting on extra labour. China, he said, lacks the money to build the Manchurian line, and it would never be even begun if she were charged with the task of making it. It would therefore be better if the Russo-Chinese Bank undertook it. I answered that I would refer the matter to the crown. Respecting the Tsar's mention of help, Lobanoff told me that he had no instructions from the crown, and that he would obtain them by the 29th inst., and resume the conversation then. He thinks that if China solicited the despatch of Russian troops, it is she (China) who should undertake to provide them with food. If China were in straits Russia should come to her assistance, and *vice versa*. But the cardinal point was that railway connection should be made through Manchuria, and the convention once ratified, a secret treaty might then be concluded. . . ."

Witte's power of suasion had been exerted to some effect before the next telegram was despatched.

*Li Hung Chang to the Tsung Li Yamen*

"2nd May, 1896 (old style).

"Concerning the treaty, there is little in it to which objection could be taken, Russia's motive being a desire to establish friendly relations with China. If we refuse it, her dissatisfaction will be deep and our interests will suffer in

<sup>1</sup> It ought to be superfluous to state that the italics are mine.

consequence. Witte was the only person who witnessed the private negotiations with Lobanoff. He gave me to read the draft of a contract with the Russo-Chinese Company, setting out that the capital must be Russian and Chinese only, the merchants of other countries being eliminated from the list of subscribers. China would receive an annual sum of a quarter of a million dollars, whether the enterprise showed a loss or a profit. There would also be paid to her an initial sum of two million dollars. The line would be handed back to her fifty or eighty years after it had been built."

It is instructive to note that one of Russia's principal levers by which this apparently brilliant stroke of national policy was effected was the fear of Great Britain and Japan with which she successfully inspired China. Her sole object in making the Manchurian railway was to shield China from the infamous designs of the maritime powers, and her resolve to build it herself was inspired by the wish to get it done soon enough to counteract the aggressive moves of Japan and Great Britain, who might *brew trouble very soon*, Li Hung Chang was assured. And so anxious was Russia to discharge this friendly office for China that, unless she were permitted to do so, she threatened to join China's enemy, Japan!

I saw and possess the treaty to which these negotiations led up. In connection with that document an amusing incident cropped up which brought out Lobanoff's easy-going unconcern and ready resource. Witte, who had arranged everything with the Chinese statesman and kept the Tsar informed of every move, at last had all the points of the bargain in his head. Nicholas II. approved them, and said that they were to be communicated to Lobanoff-Rostoffsky. Witte accordingly called on his colleague and explained to him in his emphatic staccato manner what it was that he had induced Li Hung Chang to acquiesce in. Lobanoff listened and, having heard, at once took a pen, wrote for a few minutes, and then read out what was a complete and carefully-worded treaty, divided exactly into the

requisite number of clauses. The first paragraph ran thus: "This treaty is to come into force whenever in Eastern Asia Japan violates Russian, Chinese, or Korean territory. It is stipulated that in this event the two contracting powers shall forthwith send all their sea and land forces then available to the front, give mutual aid to each other, and likewise assist each other to the best of their ability in providing ammunition and war stores." On the following day Lobanoff was received by the Tsar, and after the audience he telephoned from the ministry to Witte saying, "His Majesty fully approves the wording of the treaty. I am sending you a copy." Witte, who never grudged any pains when engaged in official work, scanned the text, and saw that the words "whenever . . . Japan violates" had been changed into "whenever . . . any power violates," etc. Witte objected to the change for obvious reasons, and he went to the Emperor and laid the case before him. Nicholas II. upheld the objection, and said that it must have been merely an oversight which he would have corrected. Just then everybody's attention was engrossed by preparations for the coronation of Nicholas II. and many things were out of gear. Lobanoff meeting Witte told him that the Tsar had apprised him of the mistake, but that he had since corrected it. "The fact is," he explained, "I wrote 'Japan' at first, but then I deliberately put the case more generally, but on reflection I find your objection adequate." The day on which the document was to be solemnly signed came round. According to custom, a treaty is never read on this last day, but is merely signed by the contracting parties. In this case Lobanoff had to put his name first. And he was on the point of taking his pen to do so when Witte cast his eye over the open treaty and to his amazement noticed that the wrong wording was in the new copy. He made a sign and apprised his colleague. Lobanoff when told of it exclaimed, "Is it possible? Well, I'll arrange it." He clapped his hands for the servant, who came in; then turning to Li Hung Chang, he said, "In our country it is a traditional custom to eat always before we sign a treaty. It is supposed



to bring luck to the nations concerned. With your excellency's permission we shall now proceed to honour the custom and also drink to the well-being of your great country." Li Hung Chang bowed, and the party went into the dining-room and sat down to lunch. By the time the repast was over fresh copies of the treaty, this time properly drafted, were on the table awaiting the signatories.<sup>1</sup>

Lobanoff-Rostoffsky had a decided turn and some qualifications for historical research, and was one of the best-informed, most cultured, and least serious of Russia's foreign secretaries. He would sometimes conceive a grandiose plan which resembled a huge joke and, like a child's balloon brought too near the fire, would collapse on the first attempt to realise it. It was he who was in power when I went to Armenia disguised as a Russian general, after having learned from my friend the "Russian statesman" what the attitude of the Tsardom was going to be towards the Turkish murderers of the Armenians of Sassun. My descriptions of what I had seen in Armenia caused a stir in England and France. Mr. Gladstone's last great speech at Chester, devoted to the subject, held up the Sultan to the contumely of the world. By that time it had become evident that Sir Philip Currie's optimism was ill-founded, and that Russia's intention was to treat the butchery as a domestic matter between the Shadow of God and his subjects, and to let the Porte have *carte blanche*. The British people, on the other hand, were for compelling Abdul Hamid to draw the line of despotism at the extermination of a race, and their view was shared by a considerable number of influential Frenchmen—De Pressensé among others—who were bringing pressure to bear upon their government in order to oblige it to take action. "Russia," who was then identical with Lobanoff, entertained serious fears that France might combine with Great Britain and thwart the Muscovite plans in Asia Minor. Hence the minister resolved to pour out the vials of his wrath upon the British as soon as he should have an opportunity. Nor had he long to wait.

<sup>1</sup>This happened in Moscow.

Public opinion in France was not strong enough to force the hand of the government; the danger was dispelled, the republic sided with the autocracy, and the Sultan decimated the Christian Armenians with impunity. Then the Russian Foreign Minister, determined to strike the iron while it was hot, imagined a scheme for a continental coalition against Great Britain. He would have satisfied France with the hope of Egypt, Spain with the retrocession of Gibraltar, and Russia was to have Constantinople and the command of the Dardanelles. But the plan remained a *pium desiderium*.

Thus, however profound the changes that might come over the rest of Europe, Russia's craving for aggrandisement was chronic and insatiable, and any man who rose up and undertook to gratify it, whether he was a narrow-minded minister, an army officer, or a simple bureaucrat, represented the Tsardom. I commented thirteen years ago on the significant fact "that Russia must pursue a policy of expansion in virtue of the sum total of her internal conditions, and that she is represented at a given moment by the man or men who are most effectually contributing to the realisation of that policy."<sup>1</sup> For some years General Kuropatkin was one of these individuals, and during that period he forced upon his colleagues a forward policy of such an aggressive character that pursued by any power but Russia it would have soon culminated in war. It was he, for instance, who insisted on the seizure of Port Arthur against the advice of the majority of the ministers whom the Tsar had consulted, and it was his pleading which was finally successful. Thus the views of the other official representatives of the Empire, some of whom were men of insight and experience, seemed but as dust in the balance when weighed against the opinion of the man who was bent on helping his master, the ruler of one-sixth of the earth, to govern one-fifth. While his star was yet in the ascendant, he noted without alarm or misgiving the symptoms of the storm which the Boxers were preparing. Indeed, Catholic missionaries, who are well-informed, asserted that the

<sup>1</sup> *Contemporary Review*, July, 1904, p. 59.

Muscovite authorities were well aware of the troubles brewing in China, and watchful subjects of the dowager empress of the celestial kingdom aver that Buddhist priests, who owed allegiance to the Tsar, went about from place to place fomenting the discontent and inflaming the passions of the people. Hence Russia being the friend might play the profitable rôle of onlooker. It was she who had warned the unsophisticated Chinese against the secret schemes of Great Britain, Japan, and the United States, and it was from her troops that the Manchu dynasty and the Chinese people would eventually expect and receive timely succour. But when it turned out that the Boxers were making no invidious distinctions between Muscovy and the maritime powers, Russia was alarmed.

General Kuropatkin, whose notions of China and the Chinese were unobscured by a knowledge of confusing facts, elaborated a scheme of policy towards that country which was accepted and partly carried out by Nicholas II. He was wont to assure his friends that the periodic popular movements against foreigners there might be aptly likened to troublesome symptoms in the arm of a human being arising from the presence of a splinter in the brain. Remove the splinter and the jerky movements in the arm will forthwith cease. Now the Manchu dynasty, he would add, is the splinter, and if Russia once seizes that, the administrative machine will work quite smoothly, responding to the slightest touch of the St. Petersburg government. And the practical corollary which the general drew from this theory was that Pekin must be taken and the emperor and empress seized. This was the "splinter theory" to which he won over the Foreign Minister, Muravieff, and the Tsar, with the result that Russian troops were despatched to co-operate with those of the other powers against Taku and Pekin. If the wily dowager empress and the weak-willed Bogdykhan had not prudently quitted the capital in time, the course of their lives, as well as that of Chinese history, would have run very differently. But when the Russian forces reached their destination, the "splinter" had worked its way to a distant

part of the body politic, and was beyond the reach of the Muscovite surgeon.

Baffled in her attempt to get hold of the heads of the Manchu dynasty, Russia reverted to her traditional policy of friendship for the Middle Empire. She withdrew her embassy to Tientsin, in accordance with the wishes of the Chinese court, urged the other powers to follow her example, protested her affection for China, and solemnly declared that she neither needed nor coveted any territory there, and by way of proving her disinterestedness promised to evacuate Manchuria. These tranquillising assurances were repeated after the Anglo-German agreement was concluded on the 16th October, 1900.

One of the lessons which this seemingly wavering policy teaches—the only lesson which concerns diplomacy at present—is that whatever else might change, the fundamental policy of Russia was immutable.

So powerful was the Tsarist system and so well equipped for the gratification of its rapacious instincts that any individual, however insignificant or contemptible, was able, with its alliance, to nullify the most strenuous exertions of a genial statesman to transform it congruously with the requirements of the new age. Now of all foreign secretaries, Muravieff was unquestionably the most uneducated and shallow-brained. He could not write half a dozen sentences, French or Russian, without making egregious grammatical or orthographical mistakes. He could not carry on conversation for ten minutes without displaying the pettiness of his mind and the coarseness of his wit. About international relations his ideas were misty and incoherent. Yet this cross between a ninny and a buffoon frustrated Witte's well-laid scheme of Far Eastern policy with the help of Kuropatkin, the Minister for War. "In some ways," Witte told me, "Muravieff reminded one of the German Chancellor Von Bülow, but I need hardly add that cultural requirements did not constitute one of them. Indeed, it was well nigh impossible to talk with him on any serious topic. Not only did he lack breadth of view, but he lacked cultural varnish, working

capacity, industry, knowledge of languages, everything. His one qualification for the office was his apprenticeship at Copenhagen, but that was considered adequate, and he was set over Russia. It was he who marred my Far Eastern policy; not he alone, of course, but in league with others.

"My intention was to take the railway through Manchuria to Vladivostok, and my objects were primarily economic, not political. That the latter would eventually follow from the former is obvious, but I set my face against annexations, wars, and other acts calculated to culminate in these. I give little for mere shadows. I contrived to carry the Emperor with me until Muravieff arrived on the scene and then a new constellation appeared with him. They induced the Tsar to take the railway south to Port Arthur and thus to make the trans-Siberian a manifest instrument of invasion. You know the sequel. Remember that within a twelvemonth of this impolitic decision Russian troops were being landed at Port Arthur,<sup>1</sup> and Muravieff issued his famous communication to the powers respecting the needs and the means of securing general peace and disarmament. I need not tell you that neither that document nor the idea it embodies was Muravieff's, still less, alas! had the alleged aim anything to do with the real purpose of the invitation thus solemnly sent out to the nations of the earth."

### *The Hague Conference Mystification*

It is always instructive and sometimes unedifying to trace momentous and lasting reforms to their veritable sources. The action and its sequel linked by the causal nexus sometimes turn out to be two ethical contraries. The revelation may be calculated to provide pabulum for the cynic and inspire the unbiassed with a feeling akin to contempt for the past. To strip such a seemingly noble act as the convocation of the world's first peace parliament of those associations of moral and humanitarian sentiments which had raised it to high rank among the achievements of the nineteenth century,

<sup>1</sup> In the year 1897.

savours of wanton iconoclasm. But history has to do with facts, not romance, and, where the former are well established, cannot choose but assign to them their proper place among the factors of progress.

Concerning the origin of the first Hague Conference, the period of public deception has lasted longer than one would have thought possible, considering that several years ago<sup>1</sup> I did my best to disabuse the world, to reveal the prosaic motive underlying it, and to set forth the order of events as they occurred. But mankind prefers romance to reality, poetry to history. *Mundus vult decipi; decipiat.* Enthusiastic publicists in London, Paris, and Vienna lavished tributes of unmeasured praise upon the Russian Tsar and commemorated gratefully, in passing, one or other of his supposed inspirers, and in particular my old friend Jean Bloch and the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna. But all agreed that whoever may have created and diffused the subtle atmosphere of enthusiasm for lofty and generous aims which must have pervaded the imperial court of Peterhof, it was the noble-minded sovereign who lived and worked in its centre, that focussed the forces of righteousness in the world, and gave them their full momentum.

From this pleasing picture the reality was, alas, widely different. It reminds me of the dastardly bomb-thrower who when carrying an infernal machine to blow up a palace dropped it on the doorstep, was knocked senseless by the explosion, was then rescued, taken care of, healed, and signally rewarded because it was charitably assumed that he was a passer-by who having noticed the explosive laid down or seen it smoking had risked his life in an heroic attempt to throw it into the street. What happened at the court of Nicholas II. that Eastertide of 1898 was briefly this:

At the beginning of the year, the Tsar, despite the protests of his Finance Minister, Witte, had, as we saw, despatched a squadron to Port Arthur under the pretext that China must be protected against her enemies. In truth, China's spokesmen were actually and vainly beseeching the

<sup>1</sup>In the year 1907.

Petersburg Foreign Office to display its friendship in some less aggressive shape. Russian marines were landed in Port Arthur, the anger of the Japanese was raised to boiling point, and the civilised world caught a glimpse of the hypocrisy and perfidy of the Tsardom. Storm clouds hung black and dense on the horizon. China was then the "sick man" whose demise, supposed to be impending, aroused the keenest interest and brought out the least creditable traits of national character. True, the British House of Commons had passed a resolution affirming that the independence of China was a postulate of vital moment to British commerce, but the one element that could have lent weight to such a declaration—readiness to fight for the principle involved—being absent, continental politicians merely shrugged their shoulders and passed on. The Tsardom had frightened and wheedled and bribed China into granting her a lease of Port Arthur—the ice-free port on the Pacific—France had followed suit and extorted concessions in Yunnan and along the Yangtse. Even Italy was itching for a coaling station, a railway compact, or some other trophy to show that she too was a factor in the larger concerns of the globe. Spain and the United States were waging a newspaper war against each other, and their respective governments were at their wits' end to hold popular passions in check. In South Africa the air was thick with sinister omens and Kruger's policy, spontaneous or constrained, was embittering the foreigners and disquieting the government of Great Britain. The French nation was riven in twain by the historic Dreyfus trial which had divided the people into clericals and atheists, nationalists and republicans, Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards.

The calmest, most active, and most thriving populations were those of the Central Empires. But their governments were industriously preparing for the "Day" when it would rain metal. Germany, ever ahead of the world in things military—and not only in these—had successfully completed the laborious and costly process of manufacturing new and improved artillery and supplying it to the army. This was a great stride forward in the race of armaments, and it was

also a warning to all the other competitors in the game of war preparations. Russia and Austria, true to their reputations and their past, were behindhand. Neither empire had made any improvement in field or heavy guns. They were both alive to the necessity of imitating the Germans, but unlike the frog in the fable, that sought to blow itself out to the size of the bull and burst in the exertion, they hesitated and would fain have postponed the sacrifices involved.

One day, Count Muravieff, the most empty-headed of the Tsar's advisers, who had succeeded M. Shishkin at the Russian Foreign Office, called on Witte who, like a masculine Fate, was spinning the threads of Russia's existence in his finance department. They were a curious pair, men of two distinct types, one might almost say of two different species, the one form without substance, the other amorphous reality. Witte had conceived an intense feeling, more akin to contempt than to hatred, for the nonentity who had upset his Far Eastern plans and gone far to mar his general policy without comprehending either. Muravieff produced a document, waved it theatrically before his colleague, said that it had been drawn up by the War Minister, Kuropatkin, read with close attention by the Emperor, and sent on for the Finance Minister to peruse and report on.

"I suppose it is a demand for more money for war materials?" Muravieff smiled but said nothing. "Unless it is for something necessary I really cannot and will not give another rouble." Muravieff muttered something about the necessity of breaking the eggs if you wish to make an omelette. Witte took the paper. He had guessed aright: it was a roundabout demand for a very large sum of money. The form in which it was put seemed to him at first but the sugar-coating of the pill. Witte frowned as he read the report: France and Germany, Kuropatkin wrote, having stolen a march on the other powers by providing their armies with the improved guns, Austria and Russia could not and would not lag behind. But the cost was deterrent, and was all the more to be dreaded that other and heavier expenses would have to be incurred very shortly, almost



simultaneously. Neither Russia nor Austria is wealthy. The populations of both empires are heavily enough taxed already. They and their respective governments would therefore, no doubt, welcome any arrangement in virtue of which they could escape the taxation which the re-arming of the national forces would entail. But how could one devise an effective plan? Could not one hit upon some simple compromise that would commend itself to both governments all the more readily that the two empires belong so to say to opposite camps? Whether you multiply or divide both the divisor and the dividend by the same number, the quotient undergoes no change. Apply that proposition to the case in point. Whether Russia and Austria go to the expense of supplying their armies with the improved guns or leave their artillery as it is, the final result, if the two groups of powers went to war, would be the same. Why then should they not agree between themselves to keep the money in their respective treasuries? If we in Russia plunge into the expense, the Austrians will vie with us and neither they nor we shall have scored an advantage over the other, yet we shall both be much the poorer. The Minister of Finance, who is the money-provider of the Empire and has an interest in keeping down its expenditure, may be able to utilize this suggestion.

That was the gist of Kuropatkin's message to the Emperor.

Witte replied with some warmth that the suggestion was not practical and ought not to have been made. "Just think it out," he said. "As an abstract proposition, Austria and Russia can well be imagined falling in with General Kuropatkin's expedient. But put the invitation in a concrete shape to the official representatives of the Austrian government and try to picture to yourself what would follow. Suspicion would at once be aroused as to the real motive of the device. Do you fancy they would accept our explanation? Nowise. They would infer either that our impecuniosity bordered on insolvency, and therefore that they could not do better than intensify it by obliging us to invest in the improved artillery, or else they would conjecture that we

were preparing to embark on some unavowed and unavowable enterprise directed against them, for which funds were needed, and that one of our methods of raising them was by economising on the new ordnance. In neither case would they close with our offer, and in either we should have injured our credit abroad. These are some of the reasons why I cannot entertain General Kuropatkin's project favourably. I need hardly add that if the defences of the Empire really call for the outlay in question, the War Minister has only to say so and I, as Finance Minister, will find the money and eschew all dangerous expedients for getting it."

Witte while thus talking turned the subject over in his mind and contemplated it from various angles of vision, giving utterance to his thoughts as they arose. He was anxious to save as much of the public money as he could, but it was impossible to allow his government to approach the statesmen of the Ballplatz with a suggestion as puerile as that framed by Kuropatkin. That was self-evident. How then could the Tsar's wish to act upon that suggestion and his own desire to economise be realised? That was the problem, and it must be solved on the lines—considerably widened if needs were, but not otherwise changed—of the War Minister's scheme. "In other words," Witte explained to me, "I knew that what was wanted was some ruse by means of which we could get Austria to stay her hand and discuss disarmament in lieu of investing in the improved gun. Within these limits then I had to work. I walked up and down the room for some time in silence, pondering the different aspects of the matter and giving utterance to my half-formed thoughts as they emerged into the realm of consciousness. They centred naturally and necessarily around my old pet idea of a league of pacific nations vying with each other in trade, industry, science, arts, inventions, and I said to myself that even if the opportunity had not yet come to draw nearer to that, there would be no harm in setting the powers talking about it. And that started me."

Witte's ideal, I may say in passing, was not identical with the League of Nations of the latter-day socialists, nor was his way of achieving it their way. But a never-fading cloud-picture in that mechanico-mystical style, rudimentary and defective if you will, not comprehensive enough for an ideal, nor thorough enough for a viable organism, and with all the tangled roots of the militarist order of things about it, but still a generous dream capable of drawing him onward and upward to a better political or social ordering than the one over which he presided, floated constantly in his mind. I cannot assert that it had much influence over his policy, indeed I know that it had not. He was much too shrewd a statesman, too clever a judge of human character, to be hastily sanguine about the coming of the League of Nations. He was not sufficiently naïve to imagine that in the minds even of the foremost peoples of the earth consciousness of their common paramount interest in a stable peace and a compact system of international law was sufficiently sharp to nerve them to the sacrifices involved in political consolidation and social advance. Moreover, being conversant with the potent elements of obstruction in his own country and in Germany, he was patient and not over-hopeful.

Witte grudged every rouble he had to spend on armaments.<sup>1</sup> He loathed the very name of war and was never weary of denouncing it. "It is my conviction," he wrote in my wife's album, "that the burden of armaments without limitations may become more irksome than war itself." To assert that the groundwork of his policy was the avoidance of war does not commit me to approval of his political aims, or of the means by which he would fain have accomplished them. His most vigorous exertions were made to safeguard peace, and the war that first marked his failure also ruined his career and undid his whole life-work.

Pursuing the train of reflections started by Kuropatkin's memorandum, the Finance Minister reflected that if in lieu of saving a few million pounds on their artillery for the

<sup>1</sup> So did his successor in the Finance Ministry, Kokofftseff.

benefit of two needy peoples it were possible, as it would be one day, to economise the countless sums of money that were being annually squandered on armaments generally, then the game would indeed be worth the candle. But all that could be done in his lifetime would be to prepare men's minds for the general reception of these notions, and in particular for the axiom that the one deadly enemy to cultural advance is militarism. Witte did not deny the fine side of patriotism, nor would he have done aught to weaken the sentiment, neither would he leave his own country inadequately prepared for the war which he knew was coming. "But I often think," he said, turning to Muravieff, "that the unexampled prosperity of the United States of America is a direct effect of its immunity from militarism. Suppose each of the States there were independent as are those of Europe, would the revenue of North America exceed its expenditure as it does to-day? Would trade and industry flourish there as they now do? On the other hand, suppose Europe could contrive to disband the bulk of her land forces, do with a mere nominal army, and confine her defences to warships, would she not thrive in an unprecedented way and guide the best part of the globe? Can that ever be accomplished? Who knows?"

The conversation ended thus: "Does his Majesty wish the money for the new weapon to be provided, or is it on the War Minister's plan that he lays the chief stress?" "He desires that General Kuropatkin's scheme should be discussed in council. It has taken his fancy. And he asked me to get your general impression in advance. I am sure he means to carry out the idea in some shape, and he hopes you will design a practical one." "Well, in that case," Witte remarked with a smile, "say that I approve the principle underlying it, but I would apply it not to Austria and Russia only, but to all the nations of the globe. In this way we should avoid invidious distinctions and leave no ground for misgivings. A proposal of this kind might be addressed to all nations, great and small; it would be welcomed by many. Whether the few would put off ordering the new

artillery is another matter. But if that be the theme to which I am to compose variations, you have them now. There can be none other."

Muravieff then left, and Witte said no more about the matter until he attended the special council at which Count Lamsdorff as Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs appeared beside Count Muravieff. As soon as General Kuropatkin had read and explained his project, Witte criticised it sharply. A lively debate ensued in the course of which the two Ministers of Foreign Affairs endorsed Witte's view unreservedly, whereupon the scheme was negatived and dropped.

Then, to the amazement of those present, Muravieff calmly took out a sheet of paper and read the rough draft of a circular to the powers on the subject of the limitation of armaments. It was Witte's proposal put in diplomatic phraseology by the Foreign Office. It was approved unanimously by all present. Witte recognised the fruit of his suggestion, and smiled at the humanitarian wrappings which had thus been vouchsafed to Kuropatkin's simple ideas, for he knew that the whole scheme was a piece of hypocrisy and guile. That rough draft—in its finished form the work of Lamsdorff—was ratified by the Tsar and subsequently<sup>1</sup> handed to all the foreign diplomatic representatives accredited to the court of St. Petersburg. Soon afterwards Witte, when making his usual weekly report to the Emperor, behaving like one of the sceptical Roman augurs, paid him a handsome tribute for the warmth with which he had taken up the great humanitarian idea. And Nicholas II. accepted the tribute as well deserved. In this first circular the object of the conference was described as "a possible reduction of the excessive armaments which weigh upon all nations." And the way to effect it was "by putting a limit to the progressive development of the present armaments." But in view of the recent improvements in artillery, of the uncertain situation, and of disturbing elements which continued to agitate the political spheres,<sup>2</sup> the Russian government

<sup>1</sup> On the 24th August, 1898.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Count Muravieff's communication to the ambassador of the French Republic (11th January, 1899).

took no further steps for a while. People hoped or feared that the matter would not be proceeded with further. But after some months' reflection and groping, the programme was modified, and instead of calling for a reduction of armaments, all that was now asked for was the maintenance of the budgetary sums allotted for them at a level which for a certain term of years must not exceed that of the year 1898-9.

There would in all probability have been no Hague Conference if General Kuropatkin had asked in the ordinary way for the necessary credit to enable him to follow the example of his German colleague and supply the Russian army with the new gun. It is equally probable that if Witte had simply accepted or rejected the War Minister's suggestion of a "deal" with Austria, the peace conference would not have been convoked or thought of. With a touch of that irony which generally accompanied his frank talks about the Tsar with an intimate friend like myself, Witte, who was sentimental rather than cynical, remarked that the Tsar's peace proposal was one of the greatest mystifications known to history, and at the same time a beneficent stimulus. However high we may rate the contributory causes of the peace movement inaugurated by Nicholas II., history will retain the decisive fact that the motive of its prime author was to hoodwink the Austrian government and to enable the Tsar's War Minister to steal a march on his country's future enemies.

This is not the place to pass in review the proceedings at the first Hague Conference, the inner history of which I outlined at the time. It rendered real statesmen, of whom there were two still living, one undeniable service: it enabled them to see that the abyss between the two groups of people into which the civilised world is divided was unmeasured—perhaps immeasurable.

## CHAPTER XV

### RUSSIA IN THE FAR EAST

No one will be surprised to learn that after these interesting exchanges of view on a burning topic, which were thus occasioned by an unavowable motive, the rulers of the Tsardom wended their way blithely in the same direction as before, bestowing their immediate attention on the Far East under the safe guidance of Witte.

The Manchurian branch of the railway was begun in the year 1899. The Minister of Communications, Prince Khilkoff, was on the point of travelling from Petersburg to Paris via Siberia and China, and had asked the Tsar's permission for me to accompany him and describe my impressions. The imperial authorisation was hardly given, however, when the Boxer insurrection broke out, sections of the railway were destroyed by the rebels, and our plans were upset. I then received permission to travel over all Central Asia, at first in a carriage to myself, which I was allowed to have coupled to any trains I wished, and afterwards in a special train for myself, which served me as bedroom, saloon, and kitchen. In this way I visited most places of note in Central Asia, including Askhabad, Merv, Bokhara, and Samarkand. After the Boxer rebellion Russian troops occupied Manchuria. But yielding to China's solicitations, seconded by Witte, the Tsar consented to a treaty<sup>1</sup> recognizing Manchuria as an integral part of China and promising to withdraw his troops gradually from that province, beginning at Mukden, which was to be evacuated within six months, and completing the operation before the expiry of eighteen months from the date on which the convention was signed. Why that promise was not kept, and what came of its breach, are matters of common knowledge. But it was not General Kuropatkin who contributed to hinder the evacuation of Manchuria or the settlement of the dispute with

<sup>1</sup>8th April, 1902.

Japan. On this subject his views were orthodox, for in the meanwhile the scales had fallen from his eyes and he saw the error of his former ways. He, and the Foreign Secretary—Count Lamsdorff—and Witte did what they could to have the Russian troops recalled and the dispute with Japan satisfactorily settled, but they failed. For they had *ipso facto* ceased to represent Russia and were no longer able even to influence her policy.

With the utmost difficulty Witte and his fellow-workers, of whom by this time Kuropatkin was one, contrived by January, 1903, to get some Russian troops recalled from the western part of Manchuria, but thereupon the evacuation of that province ceased. Moreover, Fenhwan and other points were seized. The Japanese were alarmed, for by this time it had leaked out that the source from which this policy of aggression emanated was an obscure group of irresponsible friends of the Tsar, including Bezobrazoff, Abaza, and later on Admiral Alexeyeff. These men had obtained a lumber concession on the Yalu in which certain of the grand dukes and at last, it is alleged, the Tsar himself took shares, and this was to be used for the twofold purpose of private enrichment and territorial aggrandisement. Hence Japan's claims were to be denied brazenly and unflinchingly, for it was taken for granted that, come what might, she would not attempt to enforce them by an appeal to arms. That axiom lay at the very root of the Tsar's policy.

For many years Nippon had been eager for an all-round understanding with Muscovy. But her efforts, which were sincere and strenuous, proved fruitless. It is a well-known fact, publicly admitted by fair-minded Russian politicians, that the government of Tokio had left nothing undone to merit the friendship of Muscovy. The advisers of the Emperor of Japan desired an agreement; the press warmly advocated it; the people would have enthusiastically welcomed it. But Russia, carrying out a policy of aggrandisement, which was forced upon her by the internal condition of things, repelled Japan's advances. Thus she insisted on reserving the markets of the Far East for her industry,



which could not yet be said to exist. Again, she spent large sums, which might have helped her own needy peasants of the centre, in order to found a needless school for young Japanese at Khakodate; she despatched naval officers to instruct and train the Mikado's subjects in naval matters, and incurred other expenses in order to prepare the way for acquiring markets. And yet while the treaty ports of Japan were filled with the trading vessels of the principal maritime powers, Russia's commercial flag was absent.

At this conjuncture the Tsar's blinding antipathy to Witte became intense, owing to his determination personally to conduct Russia's Far Eastern business free from the irksome expostulations of that importunate statesman. And in this resolve he was encouraged by the three greedy parasites who formed a secret government of their own on which he conferred power without responsibility. Witte endeavoured to have these anonymous instruments of the Emperor dragged from their obscurity and obliged to accept responsible posts which corresponded to the nature and degree of their activity. But the Tsar refused to give him satisfaction, and the course of the Russo-Japanese negotiations and of the international crisis in which it issued became entirely independent of the words and acts of the legally constituted government of the Tsar.

That was not the only historic occasion on which Nicholas II. intrigued deliberately against his own official government. And yet he would not allow the responsible ministers, whom he thus degraded to the level of lay-figures, to retire with dignity into private life. Witte often answered my question why he did not tender his resignation by urging that the theory of autocratic government excluded any such wilful act on the part of a public servant of the State so long as he possessed the confidence of the Tsar. Whether his impressibility to this motive was as strong as he intimated may well be doubted. When he was ousted from the post of Finance Minister on account of his opposition to the policy that entailed the Japanese war, his friend, Count Lamsdorff, relied on the same plea and remained. His colleague and

friend, Prince Obolensky, urged him to tender his resignation and accompany Witte into private life. "If you stay on," he argued, "you will gain little or nothing, for you too have steadily discountenanced the Emperor's policy and he will rid himself of you after the war that is coming." But Lamsdorff answered, "Don't worry about me. The course I am taking will, one day, be justified by the documents I possess. You will then see that I am right in staying on." "Where are they?" asked Obolensky. "They are all stored away in my house in apple-pie order. But they will not be published during my lifetime."

After the war Lamsdorff was brusquely thrust aside by the Tsar and Izvolsky promoted from the Legation at Copenhagen to take his place. This ungenerous treatment practically killed the Foreign Secretary, who soon afterwards left for San Remo and survived the blow for only a brief spell. And the justificative documents, where are they? Nicholas II. had a paralysing fear of tell-tale State papers, and having learned that his late Secretary for Foreign Affairs possessed archives full of them, despatched Prince Dolgoruky and M. Savinsky to take possession of them, examine them, and send in a report on their nature. . . . And they have never since been heard of.

But to return to the Manchu-Korean difficulties. Japan, now seriously alarmed at the signs and portents noticeable in Russia, was leaving no stone unturned to discover whither her policy tended and how to ward off the conflict that was heaving in sight. And the perplexity of the statesmen of Tokio was all the greater that they at first took it for granted that reasons of State and solid motives of national utility would alone account for the strange oscillations of the imperial government. In vain Witte besought the Tsar to stay his hand, let the Yalu lumber concessions go, and arrange a *modus vivendi* with Japan. In vain Kuropatkin, committing his views to paper, stated that the provisional occupation of Manchuria would become definitive, Japan's misgivings would be confirmed, the armaments of both empires would be increased, and the only possible outcome would be realised,

and all for the sake of a few "districts in Korea which have no serious importance for Russia."<sup>1</sup> In one of his memorials Kuropatkin wrote frankly: "The success or failure of a few enterprises in Manchuria and Korea, timber, coal, and other concerns, is much too unimportant for Russia to risk a war for the sake of them," and he went the length of putting the question whether it would not be the height of wisdom to return Kwantung, Port Arthur, and Dalny to China, in order to keep clear of war. The general's conversion was thorough.

But the political freebooters had an easy task to defeat the Tsar's ministers and to have treaties and promises rated on a level with waste paper, for they now had the support of the minister Plehve, the rising star of the Tsardom. Abaza in one of his telegrams<sup>2</sup> tells Bezobrazoff of a talk he had with the Tsar, and concludes: "In the course of the conversation the Emperor emphatically expressed his most absolute confidence in you." That was the pith of the matter. The crisis was of the monarch's own making, and the pair of intriguers, to whom Alexeyeff was afterwards added, in their quest of pelf plunged the country into a war which cost hundreds of thousands of human lives and led to the collapse of the Tsardom before provision could be made for the organism that was to succeed it.

In one respect, however, my opinion runs counter to that of some Russian publicists who hotly maintained that Nicholas II., in company with the three money grabbers who carried out his behests, "unflinchingly and consciously led Russia into the war" while hypocritically asserting his resolve to make his reign an era of peace.<sup>3</sup> I am convinced that the Tsar deemed himself to be what his foreign friends had proclaimed him, "the mainstay of the world's peace," and that so long as he was averse to war no other power would dare to risk it. Few men of his temperament who had been continually assured, as he had,

<sup>1</sup> General Kuropatkin's memoirs about the Russo-Japanese war (in Russian), pp. 151, 152. Cf. Burtzeff, *The Tsar and Foreign Policy* (in Russian), pp. 13, 14.

<sup>2</sup> In July, 1903. A whole series of telegrams that passed between these plunder-seekers was collected, and I received a copy which I still possess. In some of these despatches the Tsar is alluded to as the "proprietor."

<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Burtzeff is one of these publicists.

that he was the Vicar of God and the recipient of special divine grace would have thought or felt much differently. His tearful emotion when the conflict broke out and confronted him with disaster bears out this theory. At the same time, I know for a fact that the Russian minister at Tokio<sup>1</sup> was sending despatches of an alarming tenor, foreboding war and announcing that the only way of hindering it would be a complete change of policy. These prophecies at length became unbearable to the Emperor who one day penned his condemnation of them on one of the envoy's reports, and Baron Rosen was thereafter constrained to be chary of evil prognostications.

The Tsar's optimism permeated his private conversations, his public utterances, and the secret instructions which he had sent to his agents. His views, for instance, as to the most suitable tactics to be observed when dealing with the Japanese were telegraphed by his favourite, Abaza, to the Viceroy Alexeyeff. They have a sub-Machiavellian savour that harmonises entirely with the peculiar sort of worldly wisdom which characterised him throughout his reign. This is the first maxim, "Russia stands to gain enormously by every year of peace. Therefore, every effort must be directed to warding off war, not, however, by concessions which would surely precipitate hostilities." The second runs, "This end may most surely be attained by a firm policy, polite in form and not vexatious in secondary matters."

A few years before that I had learned that Baron Rosen's predecessor<sup>2</sup> at Tokio had written to his chief<sup>3</sup> proposing that Russia should give Korea to the Japanese, who would in return allow her a free hand in Manchuria. And the Russian representative argued impressively in favour of this transaction which would bestow an ample field on the colonising faculties of both. The answer of the Foreign Office was characteristic—characteristic of the man at its

<sup>1</sup> Baron Rosen, afterwards Russian ambassador at Washington during the peace negotiations with Japan.

<sup>2</sup> M. Izvolsky.

<sup>3</sup> Count Muravieff.

head, of the Tsar whom he served, and of the Asiatic<sup>1</sup> State which absorbed their activities. "Korea," he said, "must become to Russia what Bokhara actually is." The minister, Muravieff, can hardly have realised that geographically Bokhara is in Russia and is bounded on one side by little Afghanistan, whereas Korea was outside the Tsar's dominions and within easy reach of the growing arm of Japan.

An amazing incident connected with the Emperor's tactics, as it was the proximate cause of the war and diffuses adequate light on this chapter of Russian history, may fitly find a place here. I wrote it down to Witte's dictation. "Since I had been ousted out of the Finance Ministry I continued to impress upon the remaining ministers the views that had led to my dismissal. I exerted myself thus for the sake of the country. And my exertions were successful. One day<sup>2</sup> the Tsar convoked a special council consisting of the Ministers of War, the Marine, and Foreign Affairs, under the chairmanship of the Grand Duke Alexis. The object of the meeting was praiseworthy: how to steer clear of a conflict with Japan. The means proposed was an accord. Russia had already suggested an arrangement which the Japanese declined because it would have established a neutral zone bounded by the thirtieth parallel. And now the question was whether or no Japan's wishes should be respected and the obnoxious clause expunged. As peace and war hung upon the issue, the council resolved prudently and almost unanimously to strike out the paragraph and draft a modified convention. There was only one dissentient voice—that of Abaza. This schemer, solicitous only about his commercial concern, suggested that the clause be retained, but the boundary altered from the thirtieth parallel to the Yalu Tsian watershed. As it was highly improbable that the Tokio Foreign Office would acquiesce in this, and as, if it

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this book I employ the word Asiatic in the sense in which it is applied to Turkey or Persia, not in the sense in which Japan, who unites the higher qualities of the European and the Mongol, is an Asiatic State.

<sup>2</sup> On the 28th January, 1904.

did not, the danger of war would be imminent, the council negatived Abaza's motion.

"But that intriguer was not to be baffled thus easily. He secretly saw the Tsar and adroitly led him to believe, without actually asserting, that the grand duke and the other members of the council were of his way of thinking about the contentious provision. That done he requested and obtained permission to telegraph his draft proposal to the viceroy for his guidance. And in his telegram he characterised that proposal as the decision come to by the Emperor himself. That was a scandalous—an unpatriotic—act; for the Viceroy Alexeyeff was sure to behave towards the Japs in accordance with this alleged ordinance of the Emperor. And lest this consequence should make itself felt too late, Abaza sought out the Japanese Minister, Baron Kurino, and had the hardihood to apprise him of the decision! This naval officer, Abaza, behind the back of the Foreign Secretary, called on Japan's representative and gave him a message which—excuse me for the expression—was the diplomatic equivalent to a vicious kick . . . the direct consequence of which must, under the circumstances, be war."

"Permit me to ask you a question," I interrupted. "How could Abaza insinuate to the Emperor that his proposal was approved by the council? Were there no minutes of the proceedings, and how and why were they kept from the Tsar?" "There were minutes of the sitting, but they had to be written with great care and verified, and as the work went on very slowly it was not until three whole days had elapsed that they were ready and actually laid before the Emperor. And then the mischief was done. For before that Baron Kurino, who knew full well that the policy of Russia was being shaped without the effective participation of the Foreign Minister, and who was now informed by the spokesman and chief of the secret gang presided over by the Emperor, that Japan's reasonable suggestions had been spurned, drew the practical consequences from that alleged decision. So, too, did his government. Thus it was this untruth, minted by Abaza and passed off on the Mikado's

government, that caused the war. Before the Tsar had read the minutes of the council and charged his regular minister with drafting a note in accordance with their conciliatory resolution, Japan had recalled her envoy, broken off diplomatic relations with Russia, and attacked and damaged the Tsar's fleet.

"As you see, Bismarck's 'doctoring' of the Ems telegram is having vogue as a precedent. It will probably be followed again. When hostilities opened our press accused the Japanese of having begun the war without waiting for the official answer to their demand which was in preparation and would, if received, have acted as a sedative. The allegation is formally true, but you can see for yourself what it amounts to when analysed."

Another instance of how Nicholas II. interpreted his rôle and behaved to his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lamsdorff, is worth recording. He had a secret telegram sent to the Viceroy Alexeyeff of which Lamsdorff never knew anything until long after the war had begun. It was an important message agreeing that the Japanese should enter into full possession of Korea as far as the boundaries of the Russian concessions on the Tuman-Ula on the north and of the Yalu on the west, and ordering this decision to be communicated to the Russian ministers in Tokio, Seoul and Peking. It never was communicated to any of them. Had it gone through the Foreign Secretary's hands it would have been brought to the cognisance of the three interested governments and might have made a good impression. What Alexeyeff did with it is unknown, but it is certain that he did not present it.

Witte was so incensed against the gang that was answerable for the war that he could with difficulty curb his tongue when talking about them. "To think," he said, "that all the work I have done for the past twelve years is now being undone by a few contemptible pettifoggers who would be nothing without the reflection of the crown! It is maddening. And when I think of what will happen when the war is over and the troops come home—well, I cannot tell you how profound and poignant the impression is—I feel sorry for

the Emperor then. We shall be spectators of a tremendous world-tragedy."

The Japanese were accused of hitting below the belt when they fell foul of the Russian squadron unexpectedly, and the charge is still believed by many. I feel bound to state that having followed the ups and downs of the crisis as closely as my sources of information would permit, I formed the conviction that from beginning to end in war, as in peace, the Mikado's government displayed chivalrous loyalty and moderation. The notion that the Russians would have behaved differently from their enemies in dealing the first blow so unexpectedly is, I fear, erroneous. There is extant a telegram from the Tsar to his viceroy containing this significant injunction: "If on the west of Korea the (Japanese) fleet should sail northwards past the 38th parallel, it is open to you to attack them without waiting for the first shot from their side. I rely on you. May God aid you."<sup>1</sup>

It is needless to recount here the well-known vicissitudes of the Manchurian campaign. The landmarks of the story are familiar. Among its most disquieting features to my thinking was the scope it offered to Russian and Finnish revolutionists to spread their subversive doctrines and perfect their plans of violence. It also united all classes and nationalities in the country, not only against the policy of the State, but also against the regime. With the exception of a few members of the Bezobrazoff-Abaza band nobody wanted the war, and few could account intelligently for the government's having stumbled into it. One of the least edifying sights that passed before my eyes was the joy manifested by senators, professors, students, and other "intellectuals" whenever tidings were received of a Russian defeat. Many of them used to rub their hands with glee. Their own countrymen, their friends, and perhaps their relatives were exposed to death on the remote millet fields of Manchuria, but they had consolations: the circumstances that the army which owed allegiance to the Tsar was being decimated by the enemy, that the test which every regime has to undergo when waging war was racking and humiliating the govern-

<sup>1</sup>The telegram is dated 8th February.



ment, and that it was at last made patent to all that the position occupied by the Tsardom among the powers was usurped and out of all proportion to its internal resources and military strength—were balm to the wounds of the sorely tried subjects of Nicholas II. In this queer behaviour nobody discerned moral incoherence or a culpable lack of patriotism. Even the “moralists” acknowledged that a military defeat would have its political compensations. And yet the degree to which the moral tone of the country was lowered by these exhibitions was considerably less than the foreigner may imagine who was not acquainted with its condition before the war.

The campaign brought no respite to those public men whose plans in peace time had been countered or warped by the direct and mischievous meddling of Nicholas II. He would have his finger in every pie, military and civil. The mere belief that the Emperor took a personal interest in some particular scheme was enough to render all other projects abortive, and when he stepped forward with a definite proposal of which only specialists could appreciate the value, he was sure to find most of these arrayed in its favour. To this rule the plan of campaign against the Japanese was no exception. General Kuropatkin’s place in military history is fixed by this time, and, whether high or low, will not be greatly changed by anything new that may be disclosed in these pages. It may not be amiss, therefore, to set down a most interesting and characteristic account which Witte gave me of a conversation he had with that general soon after the Emperor had appointed him to be the commander-in-chief of the land forces.<sup>1</sup>

“Kuropatkin came to take leave of me a few days before setting out for the Far East. He seemed painfully conscious of the arduous nature of the task he was set to achieve. His former buoyancy and self-reliance had given way to an overpowering sense of responsibility. From an optimist he had

<sup>1</sup> I induced Count Witte to narrate it a few years later to one of our own most distinguished generals who was writing on the subject. I tell the story from memory because the account dictated to me by the statesman is among those documents of mine which are no longer accessible for the moment.

become a pessimist. He overrated, as it seemed to me then, the military and other qualities of the Japanese, and as I listened to his praise of them I recalled to mind the days when he had been the soul of that policy which brought us to this pass. After the usual small talk Kuropatkin looked at me earnestly and said, 'Serghei Yulievitch, do me a favour. Give me your advice, frankly and fully as a friend. Heaven only knows what awaits me. Your vision and knowledge give weight to your counsel. Let me hear it.' 'If I were a soldier I would with pleasure lay before you my idea of what your plan of campaign should be, but what can I, an ex-minister, urge upon you, our most eminent general, on a subject that lies so far from my ken?' 'Well, then, let me put a plain question to you. If you were in my place, is there anything that you would do, any line of action—I don't mean strategical but general—that you would strike out?' I thought for a moment and then I said, 'Yes, there is. And as you have asked me for advice, here it is. As soon as you get out to the Far East, make straight for the Viceroy Alexeyeff. Get him into your power. Order your men to arrest him. Treat him otherwise with all the distinction due to his position, but send him back to Petersburg. That done you can . . .'. But Kuropatkin would not let me finish. 'Dear Serghei Yulievitch,' he said, 'I asked you to give me a piece of serious advice if you would, but you are now joking on a subject that is serious to the point of tragedy.' 'Exactly,' I retorted, 'it is tragical, and that's why I am giving you advice which, whether you take it or not, will one day appear to you most serious and capable of helping you. Listen. If I were in your place I would arrest Alexeyeff and send him home. Then I would frame an explanation that could not be thrust aside, and telegraph it to the palace. I mean what I say. I would act in this way for the sake of the country, in the interests of the Emperor himself and of my own reputation. For Alexeyeff is only a courtier who will think nothing of marring your plans in order to further those of the Tsar or his own.' Kuropatkin only shrugged his shoulders and spoke of other things. Soon afterwards he left.

"In that answer of mine I had pointed to the key of the situation. Kuropatkin's plan was to let Port Arthur defend itself as best it could, to concentrate a formidable army at Kharbin, and to wait for the enemy there. Those were the tactics of Kutuzoff in the Napoleonic war. The Japanese would then have to advance into the interior, far from their base, or dispense with a decision and ruin themselves financially, economically, and in the end politically as well. But when he reached the Far East, Alexeyeff, who was his superior, first advised and then constrained him to alter his sound plan in order to carry out the Tsar's heart-felt desire to save Port Arthur. At first Kuropatkin argued, but finally he gave way, and failed in consequence either to succour Port Arthur or to realise his plan of campaign."

Witte bore these things in mind at a later date when the Emperor's orders to him—then Russia's plenipotentiary at Portsmouth—if carried out would have hindered the conclusion of peace with Japan. Therefore he discreetly ignored them.

The Japanese, who during this campaign and the crisis that preceded it gave unmistakable proofs of striking qualities which bid fair to make them one of the main factors in the future ordering of the world, bent their efforts to revolutionising the Russian working men, the intelligentsia, and above all else the army. The design was ingenious, but the technical work of executing it was uncommonly difficult owing to the ease with which a Japanese organiser of strikes, demonstrations, or riots could be spotted among white men and executed. As a matter of fact, a Japanese would not have been tolerated in any Russian city or town during the campaign. But through the medium of a number of Finns and Russians, the problem was tackled satisfactorily and large sums of money spent on revolutionary propaganda, which assumed amazing shapes, and in the purchase of arms, of which great quantities were smuggled into the country.

In the proneness of the population to revolt lay the Achilles' tendon of the Tsardom, as the Japanese and the

Germans were aware, and despite the little that one heard of the results of Japanese enterprise in this direction, the smouldering hate entertained by the nationalities and the intelligentsia against the Tsarist State was kept steadily aglow, and from time to time fanned into flames. The Russian prisoners were well supplied with literature of a kind which their native censors would not have tolerated, so too were the soldiers at the front, and by the time they returned home many of them held views wholly incompatible with the kind of allegiance expected of them by the bureaucracy and the Church.<sup>1</sup>

The strikes, the demonstrations, the subterranean agitation, the spread of revolutionary leaflets, and the brisk, illegal traffic between Finland and Russia, were in varying degrees evidences of Japanese propaganda. In Finland, too, it was eminently successful. The enthusiastic patriotism of Poland would also have been fanned into a consuming flame had it not been for the clear vision, ready resource, and enterprise of Poland's most practical statesman, who, in the best interests of his countrymen, promptly adopted efficacious measures to arrest the movement. Thus despite the difficulties with which the Japanese had to cope, they contributed perceptibly to the causes that disorganised the Russian army, cut some of the withes that bound the non-Russian nationalities together, and rendered the conclusion of peace a necessity for the dynasty and perhaps for the

<sup>1</sup> The Germans have recently had recourse to exactly the same tactics, on a more grandiose scale, under more auspicious circumstances and with far-resonant effects. On the 2nd November, 1914, the Imperial German Bank issued a circular letter to corresponding banks in Stockholm undertaking to supply the Russian Bolsheviks Zinovieff and Lunatcharski with money for their agitation and propaganda "only on the express condition that this agitation and this propaganda directed by MM. Zinovieff and Lunatcharski shall reach the armies of the front." Another circular dated 23rd February, 1915, from the Director of the Press in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to all ambassadors, ministers plenipotentiary, etc., in neutral countries announces the formation of offices for propaganda in the belligerent countries of the Entente "for the purpose of creating social movements accompanied by strikes, revolutionary outbursts, separatist movements, and civil war, as well as agitation in favour of disarmament and the cessation of this sanguinary war."

State. This necessity was clearly perceived and insistently relied upon by Witte in his representations to the Emperor, while the more cautious and tactful Finance Minister, Kokofftseff, in his confidential reply to the question whether the war should be persisted in or peace negotiations begun,<sup>1</sup> alleged the condition of things at the front, "and more particularly in the interior of the country," as grounds for putting an immediate end to the conflict.

The War Office and the Foreign Office in Tokio took up this work of propaganda, but disagreed on some important matters of detail. And, curiously enough, on the questions which divided these departments the War Office was right.<sup>2</sup>

From time to time Russian voices were uplifted against the continuation of the war. Petitions were sent to the government asking that peace be concluded. The zemstvos, which, working assiduously for the well-being of the troops, were thus rendering noteworthy services to the country, felt and said that similar services might be expected of them in peace time if they were permitted to co-operate. But the authorities refused to follow them into this perilous region. At last the minister Plehve had to forbid under severe penalties the discussion of peace at any assemblies, but the Tsar as an offset was forced to promise a consultative chamber and certain other concessions. In spite of pains and penalties, however, peace was ardently desired and frequently discussed. Sedition was rampant in the country. Japan's propaganda through Finnish agents made rapid headway. Now and again a man of courage would point out the danger to a minister or a grand duke. It is fair to Witte's memory to affirm that few men were endowed with as much moral courage as he. He feared nobody, and thought nothing of the consequences to himself. Here is a letter which he read

<sup>1</sup> On 20th June and 1st July, 1905.

<sup>2</sup> It turned upon one of the non-Russian nationalities which was being incited to rebel. The wished-for consummation could perhaps have been achieved without much effort, but the question was put:—Would it prove a real advantage to Japan or the reverse? The War Office held that it would impair in lieu of furthering the interests of Nippon. And it was proved to be right.

to me before sending it to the Tsar. It will strike many by its extreme simplicity and bluntness as well as by certain other qualities.

"28th February, 1905.

"YOUR IMPERIAL MAJESTY,—From the present condition of affairs the only rational way out is to open negotiations on the subject of peace terms and to calm Russia, at least to some slight extent, by working out with the utmost promptitude to the broadest possible issue the mission given by imperial rescript to A. T. Bulyghin.<sup>1</sup> To go on with the war is more than dangerous: further sacrifices the country in its present temper will not brook without appalling catastrophes. In order to continue the campaign enormous sums of money are needed, and also the enlistment of a large number of men. But further expenditure will entirely upset the financial and economic conditions of the Empire, and these conditions constitute, so to say, the central life-nerve of latter-day States. The poverty of the population will be intensified, and together with it the embitterment and befogging of their souls will be aggravated. . . . A new mobilisation on a large scale can be effected only by the application of force. In this way the warriors for the Far East will inaugurate their warlike career on the very place of their recruitment. If in addition the harvest should fall below the average and cholera reappear, agrarian troubles may develop in the country. Generally speaking, under the conditions now prevailing, the troops are needed in Russia itself.

"True, it is terribly painful to open peace negotiations, and it will be necessary to hedge them round with conditions capable of safeguarding the prestige of imperial power. But it is better to do that now than to wait until the future becomes more menacing. Kuropatkin will not be able to hold his ground at Telin. With the loss of Kharbin the Ussuri territory will be cut off. Roshdjestvensky cannot

<sup>1</sup> Bulyghin was a minister whose only title to fame reposes on his association with the first reform promised during the Manchurian campaign. The Tsar charged him with the creation of a representative assembly to have a consultative voice in legislation.

score success. At the same time Russia has still sufficient prestige left to warrant the hope that the peace conditions will not be very irksome. But if we refuse to humble our spirits congruously with our religious faith now after all that we have undergone, and to repent before the Most High, we shall put ourselves into a much more hopeless plight. Even though the peace terms were utterly unacceptable, it would still behove us to enter into negotiations. If they still remained unacceptable in spite of the friendly co-operation of certain great powers, it is unquestionable that in this case the entire nation would arise in defence of the Tsar and its own honour. Then we shall have purified ourselves.

"All-gracious Sovereign! In all things decision is requisite. But if decision is indispensable in happiness, it is doubly necessary in disaster. In disaster, resolution is the first step towards safety. There should be no delay. Peace pourparlers should at once be begun, and also at once your charge to A. T. Bulyghin ought to be carried out, and in a very generous spirit. Your imperial Majesty! I am of sound mind and keenly conscious. This submission is not the letter of a distraught man, but of one who discerns the situation. It is not illness that moves my hand, but resolve, resolve to tell you what others are perhaps afraid to tell you. May God aid you.

"Your imperial Majesty's loyal servant,  
"(signed) SERGIUS WITTE."

That letter, which exemplifies some of Witte's defects and qualities, had not the slightest effect on the Tsar, who had been well aware of his eminent subject's opinions and sentiment on the subject from the outset of the war. At the end of July of the same year Witte wrote a sharp private letter<sup>1</sup> to Count A. Heyden, from which I extract the

<sup>1</sup> Witte gave me copies of many of his important letters. A great many others passed through my hands when we were putting all his correspondence in order for his memoirs. This particular letter to Count A. Heyden is dated the 17th/30th July, 1905.

following passage: "I held the opinion that we ought to have accepted the terms which Japan offered us (Kurino himself, I may say, made them to me personally) at the end of July, 1903. These terms were entirely befitting. Had that been done there would have been no war. Next I was of the opinion that we should have made peace before the fall of Port Arthur. Then the conditions offered to us . . . would have been somewhat worse. I further maintained that it was incumbent on us to conclude peace before the battle of Mukden. Then the terms as compared with those of 1903 would have been still more unfavourable. It was my conviction that we ought to have made peace when Roshdjestvensky made his appearance in Chinese waters. At that moment the terms would have been almost the same as after the Mukden engagement. Lastly, in my judgment, it is our duty to make peace before a fresh battle is fought with Linievitch's army."

It is known only to a few persons now living that in the early summer of 1904, that is to say some months after the outbreak of the war, Witte had expressed his desire to meet Hayashi in order to consult with him as to the best way to end it. The Japanese minister consented to meet him somewhere on the continent, but the matter was then allowed to drop because the Tsar would not hear of it.

How well the Japanese understood the position of Russian ministers and their entire dependence on the Tsar may be inferred from this passage in one of Hayashi's letters written about that time:<sup>1</sup> "I have great respect and faith in Mr. Witte, but he is not now in a position of influencing<sup>2</sup> the Council of Tsar with his advice, and even supposing he is in power, yet he can never be his own master, since Tsar holds the authority to veto whatever Mr. Witte may do."

This is not the place for a detailed account either of the

<sup>1</sup> Dated 9th March, 1905; London, 4, Grosvenor Gardens. The letter is addressed to M. Galy.

<sup>2</sup> I have left the late ambassador's English unchanged.



Portsmouth Peace Conference<sup>1</sup> or of the strenuous but vain efforts which were put forth by a number of private individuals to end the war sooner. The first man to go to work earnestly was Witte, who had incurred the Tsar's displeasure for asking permission to meet the Japanese minister to the court of St. James, Viscount Hayashi, before the war was more than five months old. In the following year the names of a certain M. Galy, Count Benckendorff, the commercial attaché at the Russian Embassy, M. Rutkoffsky, and Baron von Eckhardstein of the German Embassy crop up, but they only write or talk. Nothing can be done. Hayashi quite naturally connected Witte's name with the idea of peace, as did most Japanese. His name was a household word in Nippon. A few years before, when M. Izvolsky was Russia's envoy plenipotentiary in Tokio, several ministers, courtiers, and other notabilities had asked him to endeavour to arrange that Witte should visit Japan, where he was thought much of as Russia's most eminent statesman. And M. Izvolsky wrote or telegraphed to Petersburg transmitting the invitation and urging its acceptance. Witte's reply was curt, and to the effect that travelling to Japan formed no part of his business. Later on, however, it turned out that the only reason why the wish of the Japanese ministers was not fulfilled was the Tsar's resolve that Witte should not go to Japan. Here again the personal intervention of Nicholas II. was felt as an impeding factor. And now once more Hayashi's wish to meet the statesman in Berlin could not be fulfilled because Nicholas II. had set his face against it.

On the other hand, Japan was unwilling to take the first step. "Japan," Hayashi had written in February, "will welcome peace, and will cultivate friendship with her present enemy after the conclusion of peace." But, he added, the proposal must come from the power that began the war.

At last President Roosevelt had the moral courage to take

<sup>1</sup> I possess all the documents, confidential and others, that passed between the interested governments and statesmen on the subject, from the letters of M. Galy and Viscount Hayashi in February, 1905, and those of M. Galy and Witte, down to the little note scribbled by the Tsar in pencil inviting the successful peace-makers to visit him at Björke.

the initiative, without which the appalling human sacrifices in the millet fields of Manchuria might have gone on some months longer. The two belligerent empires closed with the proposal unhesitatingly. As soon as the Tsar had thought the matter over, he offered the dangerous mission to Muravieff,<sup>1</sup> his ambassador in Rome, Nelidoff being unable for reasons of health to travel so far afield. Lamsdorff had suggested the name of Witte, but the monarch negatived it without hesitation. Just when Muravieff had also begged to be excused, a letter was received by Lamsdorff from M. Izvolsky, who, it is alleged, was the Tsar's delegate *in petto* and was then representing Russia at the court of Denmark. This missive eulogised Witte, declared that his prestige in Japan was enormous and would facilitate his task of peace-maker, and warmly advocated his appointment. Lamsdorff availed himself of this opening to press the matter again, and Nicholas II. finally decided to delegate Witte to the United States.<sup>2</sup> He at once sent for me and asked me to say what answer I, were I in his place, would return to this offer. That was Witte's usual way of eliciting a frank opinion, to which he invariably brought careful consideration and a perfectly open mind. He always consulted those about him in whose judgment he had confidence, even when he had strong grounds for presupposing that the advice would be diametrically opposed to his own leanings or preconceived resolve. When I had given him my views on the offer, he said, "That is exactly how I thought you would look upon it. Now this is what I think: I have been chosen not so much to render a service to my country as—figuratively speaking—to stumble and break my neck. They really want to go on with the war. It is calculated that the chances of my striking up a peace on really acceptable conditions are superlatively slight, and that in all probability, therefore, I shall fail. Then I shall be dead and buried. But my well-wishers go further and argue that if I should succeed in

\* The ex-Minister of Justice, a clever cultured man and no relation to the defunct Minister of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>2</sup> On 29th June (Russian style), 1905.

ending the war on the terms that unfortunately are congruous with the military situation, my name will become odious to every self-respecting Russian."

"And what have you decided to do?" I asked.

"I will accept and go. I hope you will come too and help me."

I soon saw that President Roosevelt's invitation had elicited, in the ruling spheres of Russia, the merest notional assent. In the mind of the Tsar the firm intention of putting an end to the war can hardly be said to have existed. Nicholas II. communicated through his ministers with the principal notabilities, military, naval, and civil, and asked them to give him the benefit of their opinion on the advisability of ending the war. And the vast majority of the answers were distinctly unfavourable. Having perused the secret reports of Generals Linievitch, Sakharoff,<sup>1</sup> Kuropatkin, Admiral Birileff, and others, I began to fear that the conflict would go on. The War Minister Sakharoff's report began thus: "In reply to your letter of the 16th June, No. 1060, I have the honour to inform you that, in my judgment, under the present conditions to conclude peace is impossible, because one cannot admit that Russia should confess herself beaten by Japan."<sup>2</sup> Kuropatkin, who, after the death of the Foreign Minister, Muravieff, deliberately inclined to a conciliatory policy in the Far East, and who possessed the ways and means of knowing the true state of things there, was enthusiastic in his plea for continuing the war in Manchuria and for patience in Russia, while his promises of decisive victory were so confident, so emphatic, so frequent and circumstantial that it would have been rash were the crown to treat them slightly so long as it maintained him at the head of the forces.

Thus on the eve of the Portsmouth Conference the chiefs of the army in Manchuria were quite confident of a speedy victory and ultimate success, and were consequently

<sup>1</sup> Sakharoff's report was marked "extremely secret," and contained a detailed estimate of the Russian and Japanese troops in Manchuria. It was dated 18th June (1st July), 1905.

<sup>2</sup> Sakharoff then goes on to say what he would advise if his view should be rejected.

impatient of the folly of the mere civilian "who craved for peace" before the army had plucked a laurel in the campaign. Russian military critics, who could and should have known the real facts, calculated that, as things then stood, the odds were largely in favour of Linievitch's army, which was also increasing in numbers much more quickly than the enemy's troops. Telegrams and petitions were received by the score from the seat of war imploring the imperial generalissimo to confide in his soldiers, who were thirsting for glory and victory. In a word, the decision to close with Witte's suggestions and enter into negotiations with Japan, although to the few it seemed obvious, imperative, pressing, needed more insight and courage than one imagines at this distance. Those who knew how restless the nation had grown and what ravages disaffection had made in the army rated the estimates of Kuropatkin and Linievitch at their true value, and saw that an immediate peace was Russia's last hope of salvation.

The Finance Minister,<sup>1</sup> who throughout this and the ensuing crisis behaved most patriotically, wrote a very sensible answer to the Tsar's question, which concluded thus, "Generally speaking, in my capacity of Minister of Finance, I feel compelled to admit that the continuation of the campaign—things being in the condition in which they are at the war theatre and more particularly in the interior of the country—appears extremely difficult, and the conclusion of peace is, from the financial point of view, supremely desirable." But the general impression left in the mind of Nicholas II. by all these expressions of opinion was that victory was a mere matter of a few months more. And even later in the year, when Witte was already at Portsmouth negotiating with the Japanese, he received telegrams enjoining on him firmness and enterprise on the ground that the army was now confident of victory. The Marine Minister, for example, telegraphed to his delegate saying, "Tell (Witte) that public opinion in Russia, including that of even the

<sup>1</sup> At that time M. Kokofftseff occupied the post. His letter is dated the 20th June (old style).

highest circles, holds that no humiliating concessions must be assented to by us. The temper has changed, patriotism is aflame. Self-confident tidings are pouring in from the army." This was the minister whose own patriotism soon afterwards stood in need of defence and who a few months before had assisted the Emperor to perpetrate an act which it is hard not to qualify as treachery.

As soon as Witte had definitely taken upon himself the conduct of the negotiations and the Japanese government had nominated the Mikado's delegate he asked me as a friend whether I would call on the Japanese minister in London, Viscount Hayashi, and lay before him an important proposal which, if accepted, would go far to render his labours in America successful. It was to the effect that instead of Komura the Marquis Ito should be sent to the peace conference by the Japanese government, and should be invested with full powers to arrange not merely such a peace as is ordinarily possible after a hard-fought campaign, but also cordial friendship, the outward sign of which would be an alliance for all purposes of the future development of the two peoples. This idea had already been suggested by Witte to Lamsdorff who had formulated it in one of his instructions. It had also been mooted by Hayashi in a private letter which Witte had read. The passage ran: "Japan will welcome peace, and will cultivate friendship with her present enemy after the conclusion of peace." That, Witte remarked to me, contained the solution of the Far Eastern problem and the clearing up of the misunderstandings between Japan and Russia. The war could not, he added, be followed by formal peace only; it must be obliterated by friendship as well. Then, and only then, would peace be established on a solid basis. That was Witte's view before he started for Portsmouth, and it became the keystone of the arch of Russia's foreign Far Eastern policy as M. Izvolsky envisaged it ever since.

I called on Hayashi and opened to him Witte's desire and on what public grounds it was that he entertained it. As a matter of fact, Witte believed that Komura had thrust

himself forward as Japan's chief plenipotentiary, while others held that Ito had declined to accept the mission which Komura had offered him. But whatever the cause of Komura's appointment may have been it was immutable. The Tokio cabinet was unable to accede to either of Witte's demands, and on board the German steamer that was taking us to New York I gave him a detailed written account of my conversation with the Japanese statesman.<sup>1</sup> Hayashi in his memoirs alludes to this matter as follows: "I met (Dr. Dillon) two or three times whilst I was in London. When Count de Witte proceeded to America as the chief Russian plenipotentiary to negotiate the terms of peace at Portsmouth, Dr. Dillon paid me a visit in London, and I had a long conversation with him on various subjects. The principal object of his visit to me was to request me to do everything which I could to induce the Japanese government to dispatch Marquis Ito to America as the principal Japanese peace commissioner.

<sup>1</sup> Count Hayashi in his *Secret Memoirs*, published in London (Eveleigh Nash, 1915), devotes a couple of pages to the part I took in Russo-Japanese relations as he saw it, from which the following extract deals with the two treaties concluded between these empires: "In the beginning of 1907 Dr. Dillon contributed two articles to reviews in England, urging the necessity of a Russo-Japanese rapprochement. These articles were shown to M. Motono, our ambassador at St. Petersburg, by M. Izvolsky, who was at that time the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs. These articles were evidently written after conversation with some high person in the Russian government, and M. Motono believed that they indicated the undoubted intention of the Russian government of entering into an agreement with Japan on the lines laid down in the articles. M. Motono drew the attention of the Japanese Foreign Office to the articles and asked for an opinion on them.

"I should say something about Dr. Dillon. His father was an Englishman and his mother was Irish." [This is a *lapsus calami*. It was the other way round.] "He was educated at various continental universities, and he possessed several high diplomas of learning. For some time he was professor at various Russian universities and also had been the proprietor of a newspaper at Odessa.

"He . . . resided in St. Petersburg. At the time I was minister and ambassador in London, Dr. Dillon was the St. Petersburg correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, and probably is so to-day. He certainly was most extraordinarily well acquainted with all Russian affairs, and any statement made by him in the *Daily Telegraph* having reference to Russia was always regarded as being based on the highest authority."

"When the negotiations were proceeding at Portsmouth it was Dr. Dillon who controlled the American press for the benefit of De Witte. At that time most of the prominent British and American correspondents who had collected at Portsmouth had gone there inclined to be in favour of Japan.

"Dr. Dillon used these men to publish the real existing state of affairs without any reserve whatsoever, and was unrivalled by anybody on the Japanese side in creating a favourable public opinion. He did it almost entirely by relying on the influence of the American papers, to whose correspondents at Portsmouth he always stated the exact position of affairs. On the Japanese side, on the other hand, nothing was done like this. True, there was a member of the Japanese Foreign Office staff attached to the Peace Commission, and it was supposed to be his duty to receive the newspaper men. In fact he had nothing else to do but that. But he made his principal task the denying of every statement which might appear.

"In view of my experience in diplomacy I considered that such a course was a matter of the greatest regret. Comparing the action of the two sides at Portsmouth, as regards the press, it was only natural that the umpire's fan was pointed at Japan from the very outset of negotiations, and she was never able to recover from the unsatisfactory press position into which she allowed herself to fall, a position which was principally due to the fact that the Japanese authorities preserved far too much silence as to the progress of the negotiations.

"With regard to the Russo-Japanese Agreement, about which I commenced to speak, Prince Yamagata and Prince Ito, as well as M. Izvolsky, recognised the absolute necessity of concluding an agreement such as had been outlined by Dr. Dillon in his articles to which I have referred."

Seldom has a statesman found himself in deeper or more dangerous waters than Russia's first representative at the peace conference, under conditions which were understood to have deterred professional diplomatists. He foresaw at

Witte in a telegram summarised the situation for his government as follows:<sup>1</sup> "We did not agree respecting payment of military expenses, Sakhalien, restrictions of the fleet, the vessels in neutral waters; yet on Monday the final sitting will be held, and for that reason if there is no concession by one side or the other we shall separate. Japan's intentions after that are unknown. Probably they will give way on (10) about ships in neutral waters and on (11) respecting limitation of fleet. But they won't abandon (5) about Sakhalien, nor (6) about military indemnity. In view of vast importance of subject I think it ought to be considered and speedy resolution taken. Continuation of war would surely be greater disaster for Russia. We can defend ourselves more or less, but can hardly conquer Japan. Forecast of a favourable result may be grounded only on exhaustion of Japan's resources. Am unable say what sacrifices can be made to avoid war and its horrors and whether internal conditions would terminate with unfavourable peace. It is obligation of imperial government to discuss subject and submit resolution to Emperor. I venture utter following modest thought: the fate of ships in neutral waters is important from point view of national dignity. But has no practical significance. It is the same with the limitation of our fleet. For practically we should not be able hold fleet in Far East capable of fighting Japs. But question of indemnity is important as touching Russia's dignity and her vital interests as well. Therefore it disquiets Russia's heart. Sakhalien is important because it was ours, is rich in minerals, and is a foreport of Amoor River. But Japs had certain rights there before ever we had acquired any. We did not utilise its wealth nor should we do so for very long. Japs are for guarantee that Sakhalien shall not be used for strategic or technical purposes against us. Even if island remains ours, still the straits that can be navigated by great vessels will be under the power of the Japs. Our main misfortune is that island is in hands of Japs, and I don't see possibility of recovering it at least for some decades to come. Deeming

<sup>1</sup>4th/17th August.



it my sacred duty to set forth the above I await urgent instructions."

Lamsdorff informed Witte<sup>1</sup> that he was mistaken in supposing that his powers would allow him to abandon the island of Sakhalien to Japan. This is by no means the case, and the Tsar wishes him to treat this explanatory statement as a supplement to his instructions. Another message<sup>2</sup> expressly forbids him to surrender Sakhalien together with the neighbouring islands and the railroad from Kharbin to Port Arthur. On the 13th August a telegram was received enjoining on him, if the negotiations failed, to arrange so that they might readily be resumed later on. Then it is the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevitch whom the Tsar must consult before Witte may again meet the Japanese delegates. The Tsar had written: "Inasmuch as the negotiations are bound to be broken off in a few days, no armistice must be concluded."<sup>3</sup> On 19th August, Witte telegraphed: "Final sitting will be Tuesday, 3 p.m., not Monday." On 19th August he was becoming nervous in consequence of the attitude of the Emperor and he sent this personal telegram to Lamsdorff: "In view of the Tsar's resolution on my telegram No. 15 I consider further negotiations quite useless. Still I will wait, as you wish, for answers to my telegrams based on private conversation with Komura. In no case can the decisions be waited for very long: two or three days after Tuesday, but no longer. Congruously with your despatch No. 432 I will endeavour to arrange so that together with the Japs we may request President to summon new conference whenever he may deem it opportune—so as not to shut the door entirely."

The Tsar's resolution which thus discouraged his plenipotentiary was this sentence scribbled across Witte's telegram about Japan's demands: "It has already been said: not a rood of territory, not a rouble of money for military expenses. On this ground I will stand to the end." The next notification is that Nicholas II.—for he it was that made

<sup>1</sup> Secret telegram, No. 384, 18th/31st July.

<sup>2</sup> 12th August.

<sup>3</sup> 19th August.

every decision except the most important one of all, which as we shall see Witte deliberately wrested from him after long reflection—refuses to cede the southern half of Sakhalien and pay for the northern part.<sup>1</sup> Then comes the statement that the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevitch finds Japan's peace conditions unacceptable, and Lamsdorff adds: "His Majesty's final decision and the imperial instructions respecting the breaking off of the negotiations I can communicate to you only after my personal loyal submission, probably to-morrow evening."<sup>2</sup>

To this Witte pertinently replied: "When conference is over and world gets insight into our work it will say that Russia was right to refuse indemnity, but it will not be with us on question of Sakhalien. For facts are stronger than arguments and mental combinations, and the central fact is that the Japs possess Sakhalien and we cannot take it back. If, therefore, we wish to shift blame for failure of conference to Japanese shoulders we must not refuse both the cession of Sakhalien and also indemnity. If we want sympathy of America and of Europe too we must give definite answer, taking Roosevelt into account."

At last the knell of the conference appeared to sound. A telegram was received which after a short preamble terminated thus: "In view of all this it has pleased his imperial Majesty to command you to break off further discussions with the Japanese delegates if they are not empowered to abandon the exorbitant claims they have put forward."<sup>3</sup> Another despatch of the same date authorises Witte to apprise President Roosevelt that the Tsar has ordered the abandonment of the debates, to thank him for his co-operation, and to hint that under more favourable conditions Russia would again meet Japan's representatives and talk the matter over. A third message sent from Petersburg on the same day enjoins on Witte to inform Lamsdorff the exact date when negotiations are to be formally broken off, as the Tsar's government must issue a communication.

But Witte, now in sight of the goal, would not be trifled

<sup>1</sup> 20th August.

<sup>2</sup> 21st August.

<sup>3</sup> 22nd August.

with in this way any longer. He took things into his own hands and decided on his own responsibility that he would not carry out the Emperor's instructions and break up the conference. It cost him a great effort to make this resolve. Here is an extract from the message in which he announces it to Lamsdorff: "Congruously with the instructions received we would break off the negotiations to-morrow and make due communication to the President." But in view of the letter received from the President which has been forwarded to you *in extenso*, and which calls for a reply from his Majesty, I consider it inadvisable to end the sittings before that reply has come. I will try, therefore, unless the Japs raise difficulties, to postpone the final sitting until that reply has come. With the Japs I think we have finished, but to break off before his Majesty's answer is received would, I fear, be to offend the President. And it seems advisable to do nothing to drive the President over to the Japs who, even as it is, have done their utmost to win America's sympathies."

A curious thing happened on the eve of the agreement when the Tsar's plenipotentiary, after having painfully dislodged the mountains of obstacles which had separated him from the goal, stood at last in sight of it, and within a few hours of attaining all that Russia could reasonably expect. Between him and the precious objects for which he had been working there suddenly arose the insignificant figure of Nicholas II. commanding him to end everything immediately on receipt of the despatch and return home. This is how it came about. On 27th August he had telegraphed to the Foreign Secretary as follows:

"To-day I was informed through the secretaries that Takahira wished to speak to me. I signified my readiness to receive him in my room after dinner. On entering Takahira said that in view of the fourteen hours' difference in time at Tokio he had not yet received reply. Therefore, he would ask me to fix the sitting not for to-morrow but for Tuesday. I replied I considered I had no right to refuse request. But I again declared most categorically that on no account will

we consent to go back upon the decisions taken congruously with the last imperial instructions, that I will reject every new proposal without referring it to Petersburg. Therefore, if he reckons upon our yielding he is wasting his time and ours and keeping the world on tenterhooks to no good purpose. Apparently Takahira acquired conviction that I meant what I said. Having thanked me for postponement he withdrew. From my conversation with him I came to conclusion he was acquainted with Tsar's answer to President and generally with negotiations with Meyer in Petersburg." The next day Lamsdorff answered thus: "28th August. On your telegram of yesterday No. 42 it pleased his Majesty the Emperor to write: 'Send Witte my command to end the discussions at all hazard to-morrow. I had rather go on with the war than await gracious concessions from Japan.'" Luckily for Russia, Witte paid no heed to this behest and ended everything satisfactorily.

The odd way in which Nicholas II. received the tidings that his plenipotentiary had secured peace for Russia and indirectly a new lease of power for the reigning dynasty was wholly in keeping with that monarch's character. On the morning when Komura and Takahira gave way and the terms were agreed to, Witte sent this message to the Tsar: "I have the honour to inform your imperial Majesty that Japanese have accepted your demands respecting conditions of peace, and in this way peace will be restored, thanks to your wise and firm decisions, and in precise congruity with your dispensations. Russia will remain in Far East the great power she was hitherto and will ever remain. We set our whole mind and Russian heart to the fulfilment of your behests. We beseech you graciously to forgive if we failed to achieve more. Your loyal servant, Sergius Witte."

The next day brought an answer. I remember the eagerness with which my friend snatched it and ran his eye over it, and then the change that came into his face as he threw it to me and exclaimed, "Good God! Read that!" This is what I read:<sup>1</sup> "Peterhof, 30th August, 1905. Do not

<sup>1</sup> The telegram was in Russian, but in Latin letters.

sign the conditions of the peace negotiations until amount for keep of war prisoners is fixed and ratified by me after you have notified it. Nikolai." That was the imperial message. No thanks, no tribute of recognition. Not a word more. Witte's ex-pupil the Grand Duke Michael behaved differently. From him came these brief but cordial words: "My heartfelt congratulations on brilliant termination of grandiose work achieved for well-being of dear Fatherland."

Witte grew impatient and apprehensive. He kept speculating on what was going forward in Peterhof and Petersburg and ruminating on the strange mental workings of the Tsar. And the things he apprehended were dismal, but I believe quite possible. But I cheered him up and prophesied that before the end of the year he would have received the title of Count. This prediction irritated in lieu of soothing him, for he was prepared for something very different from that. The nervous strain was great. On the third day, however, his suspense was ended by a chilling telegram from the Emperor which grudgingly paid a tribute to the benefactor of his country and sovereign. It ran thus: "I express to you my thanks for the able, firm conduct of the negotiations which you worked out to a good issue for Russia. Convey my gratitude to Baron Rosen and the remaining delegates. Nikolai."

It was not until the whole world, including Kaiser Wilhelm, had sung the praises of Russia's greatest statesman that the Tsar, unbent a little, joined the chorus of applause, and seemed to recognise the worth of the service rendered by his most distinguished subject. But that is another story which brings us to Björke and the strange doings there of Nicholas II. and the German Kaiser.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE SECRET TREATY OF BJÖRKE—I

OF all the extravagant and, one might add, irrational acts of the weak-willed sovereign who at last gave the death-blow to the Tsarist State the secret treaty, consisting of four brief clauses, which he concluded with Kaiser Wilhelm at Björke in July, 1905, occupies a foremost place. Politically it was a deed of surrender to the only formidable rival of his Empire, a covenant which crowned the suicidal process he had already inaugurated when he ordered Witte to accept Germany's proposals for a commercial treaty.<sup>1</sup> The commercial treaty bound Russia economically to the Teutons, was in fact the first step towards reducing her rôle to that of one of their colonies, while the Björke agreement gave official recognition to the Kaiser's cherished plans for the permanent reorganisation of Europe, placed the resources of the Russian Empire at his disposal for their realisation, and implicitly handed over France to his mercy. Wilhelm II. could not dispense with Russia's co-operation in the work of constraining France to enter into an alliance which she would never have accepted of her own free will, and Nicholas II. foolishly pledged himself to supply it. From the only other point of view worth considering, the act marked the Tsar as a degenerate on whose mind no political ideal, no wise principle of international policy had stamped itself durably. It may be worth while to cast a glance in passing at the scheme which Wilhelm II., as the representative and spokesman of the German people, had formed and was working indefatigably and methodically to embody.

The psychological diagnosis, so common in France and Britain since the outbreak of the Great War, which represents Kaiser Wilhelm II. as a maniac of some kind and degree, is

<sup>1</sup> That ruinous arrangement was negotiated between Bülow and Witte and their expert advisers in the summer of 1904. It is the same treaty that at present obtains between the two countries (March, 1918).

one of the symptoms of the self-deluding propensities of the Entente nations. It is an injustice to one's people to belittle their adversaries, and it is self-degradation to defame them. The Kaiser has probably more to answer for than any other ruler known to human history, and future generations will associate his name with the most appalling crime against mankind ever recorded, but it avails us nothing to gainsay the fact that in all his exertions for what he supposed to be the good of his people he had remarkably clear conceptions and a right understanding of the relation between cause and effect. The tenacity, resource, and efficiency with which he worked to perfect his armies, to build a navy, and to arrange the requisite political conditions for the attainment of his principal aim challenge recognition which one may bestow without committing oneself to anything like approval of that aim. It can hardly be doubted that he himself believes in its loftiness. Therein lies his force and the force of the whole German people which shares that belief. They are animated by that living, incandescent faith which melts away in its blazing flame all individual and other interests except the welfare of the collective organism as they misunderstand it. That is one of the many differences between the Teuton races and others. Parenthetically, I should like to record my conviction that the Japanese, in at least as high a degree as the Germans, are permeated by this sustaining faith which together with such invaluable qualities as vision, organisation, grasp of detail, loyalty, and a fine sense of measure foredestine them, whether or no we like the prospect, to play a most important part in determining the trend of human progress.

It is needless to remark that the qualities of unscrupulousness in the pursuit of ends, insensibility to what Entente peoples regard as points of honour, coarseness in address, arrogance towards inferiors and equals from whom nothing is expected, obsequiousness and flattery towards those who are to be exploited or duped, and the countless forms of duplicity and untruthfulness as helps to success appeal neither to the Latin nor to the Anglo-Saxon nations. But one would

do well to remember that this list by no means exhausts the catalogue of Teuton characteristics; of their positive qualities as well as of their repulsive defects the war has given ample illustrations. Adaptability to changing circumstances is one of the positive forces of the Teuton race. It runs through their latter-day history like a white thread in a dark texture. It is their source of elasticity in organising, of coherence in politics, of docility and buoyancy in battle. Yet the judgment rashly passed on them by some leaders of the Entente nations is that they are stiff, unbending, wanting in initiative, inaccessible to new ideas, easily disconcerted and demoralised. As a matter of fact it is the non-Teuton peoples who are slow to quit their habits of thought and action and accommodate both to the new conditions of existence. Of the latter-day Teutons at their best and their worst Wilhelm II. is a type.

In ethics the Kaiser is a law unto himself, and his morality is in essentials that of the entire German race. He also has his own ideals of international life which, if I who have heard and read a great deal about them may venture to say so, differ in only one or two particulars from President Wilson's League of Nations. It is superfluous to add that these differences are momentous.

The German ideal in international ordering is the equivalent of absolutism in national politics. As the State governs the nation so a chosen race should direct the Continent and, if possible, the world, and its instrument at the outset can only be force. The leading rôle falls naturally to that race which has given proofs, not only of the greatest, but also of absolute aptitude to do it justice, and this race is the Teuton. Opposed to this conception stands that of the democratic peoples of the world who are for republicanism with a tendency to anarchy at home and for equality in the dealings of State with State. Their instrument is law and public opinion, but their sluggishness in working out this conception, which they might long ago have done, to a fruitful solution is apparently invincible. And the reason is not far to seek. Most of the political organs of these advanced



communities of the west, such as the monarchy, the republic, the legislative chambers, the press, appeared to Wilhelm II. as little better than mere shams. The so-called democratic peoples exist, he alleged, for the few, and the few are among the most narrow-minded and ignorant of God's creatures. Their institutions are in many cases mere veils that conceal from the people a degree of insensibility to their needs and sufferings greater far than that which the English and the French ascribe to the German government. And that is why they have made no serious effort to draw nearer to the national and international ideals towards which they profess to be striving. If their professions were sincere, why, he asked, have they never been accompanied by an organising policy? The reason is, he answered, because, if the reform were carried out, the reformers' easy job would be gone. In democratic lands the ignorant talker comes nearly always to the top, and the nation has to be content with appearance in lieu of reality. Accessibility to new ideas and the systematic use of the intellect are checked and discouraged there. In Germany, despite what the French and the English say to the contrary, it is very different. There the career is really open to the talents; things, however imperfect, are at least what they seem, and the rulers are both competent and efficient.

The Kaiser professed to believe that under the German system nature is made more subservient to social needs than under any other, and that the higher and nobler elements of human character have freer play there. Consequently the other races, and in particular the Russian, French, and Italian, would stand to gain by closer intercourse with the Germans, and would benefit by the incidental advantage of substituting a moral relationship which would exclude war for the state of nature that exists at present between them and all the independent States of Europe. To establish this intimate intercourse has been the Kaiser's goal ever since he had a policy of his own. His way of reaching it was to induce or oblige the continental powers to assent to the formation of a somewhat looser league than that which keeps

the component parts of the German Empire together, and to work on that fulcrum for the elimination of war from continental politics, and also for the establishment at some future period of a supreme board of government for all European nations on which other great peoples would also be represented, as are Bavaria, Württemberg, Saxony, etc., on the German Federal Council.

Hopefulness and a high degree of faith in humanity thus organised and directed, or as we should say Teutonised, marked some of the characteristic speculations in which Wilhelm II. indulged. The general public has perhaps forgotten the sensation produced by the picture which he fathered representing the European nations putting the "yellow-skins" to flight, with the inscription, "Peoples of Europe, protect your most sacred possessions."<sup>1</sup> On that canvas, a reproduction of which he sent to President Carnot, France occupied a foremost place by the side of Teutonia, whereas Britain was relegated to the background.

Some of the persons who mentally connected this little incident with the main political movements of Europe fancied that the Kaiser's ideal was as disinterested and generous as the kindred visions of Turgot or Condorcet. I confess I could never bring myself to share this view. What Wilhelm aimed at, it seemed to me then and seems to me still, was a vast world-organism such as was dreamed of by some of the popes, and presided over by the head of the Hohenzollerns, rather than the revival of the empire of Charlemagne. It was a vast scheme of polity conceived for a continent, or rather for humanity in its entirety, and therefore from a much broader angle of survey than that of Charlemagne. The marvellous potency with which it appealed to men of German blood is intelligible to those who realise the intensity, the passion born of their faith in the unbounded potentialities of their race. To them they are

<sup>1</sup>Japan's genial statesman, Ito, told me in presence of several other persons, including the late W. T. Stead, that when he was received by the Kaiser he espied that picture hanging in the apartment where they met. Tact and fine feeling are not among the qualities of Wilhelm II.

the salt of the earth, capable of progress which has no fixed limits, and capable too of adjusting the social and political forces of the world to the magnitude of the community and the variety of its temperaments, needs, and aspirations. And in verity this was no mere abstract speculation, no spinning of theory from the phrase-germs of philosophy, but a concrete scheme complete in all its parts. And the first nucleus of the vast society which he was thus eager to build up was, as I have said, to be composed of the great powers of the Continent—a league of European peoples of which the crowned head of the German Empire would be the *ex-officio* leader.

For many years I have been acquainted with the gist of the colloquies which he had with my friend Witte on the subject, whose temper in some few respects resembled his own, but who differed from him profoundly in other ways. The impulsive and unbalanced German monarch is certainly endowed with some of the qualities which in the times of yore went to the making of founders of religions—fire and mysticism, ecstatic vision and shrewd practical sense, concentrated passion with a slight touch of dreaminess, the whole combined in a personality who believes that his true vocation is the handling of men. Wilhelm's plans were marked by grandeur of conception and solidity of preparation. Moreover, however low one may rate his administrative abilities—and many of our people affect to regard him as little better than a fool—in his mode of tackling the problem on its feasible side and dealing with the recalcitrant or indifferent governments whose co-operation he needed, he knew exactly what it was that he required from each and how best he could obtain it. In grappling with Russia, for example, he assimilated the idea which I had long been recommending to the notice of the British government, that the only arrangement which could really bind the Tsardom—if any compact could—must be concluded directly with the Tsar himself and, if possible, not through the ordinary diplomatic channels.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf., for example, *Contemporary Review*, June and July, 1904, "The Obstacles to an Anglo-Russian Convention," by E. J. Dillon.

The most arduous, delicate, and dangerous part of the task was the yoking of France to Germania's chariot. For the wound caused by the amputation of Alsace and Lorraine had never cicatrised. It still festered and rankled. The Kaiser employed all the arts of conciliation with which he happened to be conversant. He lavished honeyed phrases and graceful compliments on almost every Frenchman that came in his way from my first French friend, the ex-minister Jules Simon, to the manufacturer of chocolate. He had condoled with the widow of Marshal MacMahon, had pardoned two Frenchmen interned on a charge of espionage, and for some ten years he applied this system of cheap beneficence to living down the antipathy which was being strengthened by the very acts intended to remove it. He had failed to touch the responsive heart of France. He had never been able to visit the city on the Seine. His policy of giving a helping hand to the French in their efforts to extend their colonial empire had not touched either the people or their rulers. He never understood their mentality.

During the Fashoda crisis I felt that he had an exceptionally favourable opportunity, the like of which might not perhaps occur again, and I was curious to watch the use he made of it. But it brought him no returns. Shortly afterwards another and still more auspicious conjuncture was formed by the Boer war, when practically all Europe was arrayed against Britain. Almost automatically the coalition of continental nations shaped itself. A generous gesture on the part of Wilhelm II. and he might have effected much of what he was striving after. But the devices and expedients which he and others imagined and put in motion during that period were jejune and barren. Russia's Foreign Secretary, the vulgar Count Muravieff, was in Paris in November, 1899, and calling on Delcassé he "suggested" the advisability of making "representations" to England in concert with France and Germany. The suggestion, like so many others that have a Russian, French, or British appearance, had been "made in Germany," approved by

the Tsar, assimilated by the Tsar's minister, and reproduced as a Russian proposal. The idea underlying it was the same that had actuated the three powers in their intervention to upset the Treaty of Shimonoseki between China and Japan. Delcassé answered affirmatively, adding that the representations which he favoured would be courteous and theoretical, and would merely offer to the English the assistance of the republic in concluding an honourable peace. As this answer was not what had been expected the matter dropped. In the following year<sup>1</sup> Muravieff tried again, and with somewhat better results. On his way back to Petersburg he stayed at Potsdam, where he reported to Bülow and the Kaiser what he had heard and seen<sup>2</sup> in the French capital. They were only half satisfied with the result attained by the undiplomatic Russian, but resolved to make the best of it. I have grounds for believing that the lukewarmness of the French government was less marked than has since been asserted. The joint move could have been arranged without difficulty if the Kaiser had had either the enterprise to pay the full price then and there, or else the patience necessary to wait until some future time for a more abundant harvest from the seed he was sowing. The immediate consequence of what he actually did was to frustrate his whole plan and estrange France from Germany more completely than before. He began by impressing the Russian and French governments with the seriousness of the concerted action contemplated, the need for a long sustained effort and a united front, and consequently the removal in advance of all causes that might lead to differences among the three powers themselves during their diplomatic crusade in favour of the Boers. And by way of removing the most dangerous of these causes he deemed it indispensable that France, Russia, and Germany should guarantee the integrity of each other's European possessions. That proposal revealed the cloven foot. Its acceptance would have meant that the lapse of twenty years had sufficed to make the French nation resign itself to the loss of Alsace-Lorraine and ratify voluntarily the treaty that

<sup>1</sup> In 1900.

<sup>2</sup> In February, 1900.

gave these provinces to Germany. Thereupon the negotiations broke down and subsequently the Kaiser had the hardihood to assert—in order to ingratiate himself with the British—that his object in laying down that deterrent condition was precisely to render his own scheme impossible.

But the most favourable moment of all for the execution of Wilhelm's design was in 1904-5, because Russia, being at first busied and then crippled by the Manchurian campaign, France was deprived of her mainstay. And as her diplomatic position in Europe depended very largely on the worth of her alliance with Russia, the prostration of this Empire left the republic almost isolated. As the Kaiser himself wrote to the Tsar, England "could not defend Paris" with her fleet. And according to the traditional German idea, the capture of Paris connotes or entails the conquest of France.

It was evident, therefore, that the only way to get the republic to join a combination of the kind which Wilhelm desired was by constraining it. There was no alternative. Now constraint could be effected only with the active help of Russia. And as the Tsar was Russia, he must win over the Tsar. At the first blush the task seemed easy enough. Nicholas II. was a timid, shy, insignificant creature who seemed unable to offer effective resistance to a clever campaign of suasion and intimidation. Already he had proved so weak-willed that the Kaiser managed the Kiao Chow business with ease. But that was Wilhelm's only victory over his imperial relation. Since then the Tsar had been careful and kept out of further temptation. He shunned the society of his Teuton kinsman. Indeed, cordiality could hardly be said to mark the relations between the two. The calculating German monarch, who now needed the services of the Russian Tsar, was resolved to ascertain the reason and remove it. And he went to work in this ingenious fashion. Witte was sent to Germany to negotiate with Bülow a commercial treaty<sup>1</sup>—a delicate and momentous task just then because this accord was foredestined by the Berlin government to be the groundwork of Germany's future prosperity.

<sup>1</sup> In the summer of 1904.

The treaty with Russia was the first to be concluded on the new lines and was to serve as the model for all others. Moreover, Witte had been the bitter opponent of all Germany's rapacious proposals on the subject, and had even declared that under no conditions would he assent to this particular arrangement. But the vicissitudes of the war had made the Tsardom pliant, and it was now willing to pay the Kaiser's price for the privilege of employing in the Far East the troops necessary for protecting its frontiers in the West. And that price was the treaty on Germany's terms. As Nicholas II. could not well refuse this, he sent Witte with a number of experts to do the best he could under the trying conditions. And what this statesman actually effected was worthy of admiration.

Witte was known personally as well as by reputation to the Kaiser. He had negotiated through delegates a commercial treaty with Germany under Alexander III.,<sup>1</sup> and certain of the stratagems he then employed were still talked of in Petersburg and Berlin. For example, Count Caprivi was determined that come what might Russia should give Finland the right of concluding a separate autonomous treaty with Germany, and Count Shuvaloff, the Tsar's ambassador in Berlin, apprised Witte of this condition *sine qua non*. Witte, without consulting the Emperor, sent an urgent telegram to the ambassador demanding the absolute withdrawal of the demand, and in case of a refusal threatened to recall the delegates from Berlin. No reply came for several days, and it looked as though Germany would not give way. Witte became uneasy and said to one of his friends, "I am anxious, but I have the consolation of thinking that Caprivi is not less so, and at this moment he is probably walking up and down in his study like me, uncertain what to do." At last Shuvaloff telegraphed that the Kaiser's government would not press the point. Witte reporting next day to the Tsar confessed that he had exceeded his powers, but that the Germans had given way. "And that's as it should have been," responded Alexander III. who shook hands with him warmly.

<sup>1</sup> In the year 1893.

But despite this success the negotiations were moving slowly. Witte was dissatisfied and apprehensive. The Junkers were obstructive. In order to silence them the Russian Finance Minister decided to try the effect of a ruse. He requested his friend Kovalevsky to draft a bill for presentation to the Council of the Empire forbidding the Polish harvesters, without whose cheap labour the East Prussian could not live,<sup>1</sup> to hire themselves out of Russia any more, unless the German government should give way to the Tsar's ministers on the contentious questions under discussion. The bill was duly drawn up, printed, signed by the wily Finance Minister, and then all the copies but two were burned. Of these two Witte contrived that one should be stolen and given to Caprivi, while the other found its way to a Prussian agrarian journal as "a very confidential State paper." Caprivi laid the important document before the deputies at a secret sitting and the Junkers gave way all along the line. Witte had also had interesting talks with the Kaiser about the reconstruction of political Europe, which set both of them pondering over the problems involved.

But since that time the Russian statesman had experienced the inconstancy of the German monarch. Wilhelm II. had, however, of late frequently lavished genuine praise and heavy German flattery on the Tsar's most trusted servant. "If you were my subject," he once remarked, "I would employ your services as Chancellor, and there is nothing that we two working together could not accomplish. But men like you are the world's rarest possessions, and the Tsar is a lucky monarch." Now Witte was very sensitive to flattery and could be led, up to a certain point, by a potentate like the Kaiser who condescended to swing the censer briskly before his face. Wilhelm more than once expressed his regret that he could not have the benefit of consulting the genial Russian whenever he needed advice, and his hope that Witte himself would not hesitate to offer him suggestions whenever they occurred to him, especially

<sup>1</sup> In the year 1905 Prussia employed 454,348 foreign workmen, of whom 124,184 were Russian subjects. In the year 1911 she required 820,831 foreign working men, of whom 204,522 were of Russian nationality.



if the matter were important. He would ever welcome his counsel and feel grateful for it. They must look upon each other as friends. On Witte this soft sawder produced the intended effect. The first occasion that arose after that for appealing to Wilhelm was when the agreement between the latter and the Tsar respecting Kiao Chow was about to be executed. The Russian, as I narrated in a preceding chapter, repaired to the German Embassy, saw Von Tschirschky, reminded him of the Kaiser's permission to appeal to him, and said that as the leasing of the Chinese port would bring disaster to Germany and Russia, he implored the Emperor to waive his claim to the execution of the compact. The Kaiser was wild with rage, but answered that Witte was obviously unaware of the circumstances that preceded and conditioned the conclusion of the covenant, and he kept Nicholas II. to his bargain. Witte too was angry and often complained bitterly to me of the Kaiser's impulsiveness, fitfulness, and inconstancy.

The former cordiality was not restored until the Tsar's great subject on his return as peace-maker from Portsmouth was received by Wilhelm at Rominten, and then it lasted for less than a week.

But to return to the year 1904. When the Kaiser's promise to guarantee Russia's western frontier called for some practical manifestation of Russia's gratitude, Witte was deputed by the Tsar to repair to Germany to bargain with official representatives of the government and beat down their exorbitant demands for concessions in the new commercial treaty. He afterwards narrated to me his varied experiences there, and in particular the conversations he had with Von Bülow.<sup>1</sup>

This is not the place to give to the world the details of the interesting story. It may, however, be permissible to state that the Kaiser extorted from the Tsardom, for this mark of his friendship, a tribute which Stolypin and Witte both assured me was much greater than any war indemnity on record. I needed no one to tell me that the renewal of

<sup>1</sup> All these conversations, many of which were dictated to me after lunch or dinner, are extant, but they are not all accessible at present.

this accord would create friction intense enough to start a conflagration. In conversation with the Tsar's ministers in March, 1914, I gave free utterance to this conviction. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs admitted that I was probably right, but requested me, if possible, to abstain from drawing public attention to this danger. Witte confirmed my view, emphatically repeating, "It will assuredly lead to war." He was right. As a matter of fact, before the negotiations had begun it became one of the main factors of the present struggle.

Russia was not a free agent in 1904 when she acquiesced in Germany's demands. So long as she was unfettered her resistance had been invincible. But as usual the Teutons opened their campaign most ingeniously. On old Christmas Day, 1902, they raised the duty on corn from 43 to 78 per cent. and enacted that it could not be lowered by commercial treaties. Owing to this law they could afterwards plead that their hands were tied. This increase meant for Russia an annual tribute to Germany—and from one source only—of eighty million marks which would become greater every year. Witte responded by raising the duties on German manufactured goods. When pourparlers began the Teuton method was again resorted to and the demands preferred were exorbitant. Russia held out for a lower corn tariff, Germany for the abolition of the excess duties on manufactured goods to be levied by the law of January, 1903, and also *for permission for all the Kaiser's subjects, without exception, to purchase and possess land in any part of Russia on the same footing as the subjects of the Tsar.*

Witte declared that he preferred a tariff war to economic subjection of that degree and duration. Nothing, he added, would induce him to entertain the demands of the Berlin government. But the Tsar's Yalu speculation and its sequel had bereft his Empire of its independence. The Japanese were defeating Russia's armies in Manchuria. The nationalities in the interior and the revolutionists there and abroad were joining hands and menacing the throne and the regime. Nicholas II., unable to withstand the pressure exerted by

the Germans, sent Witte to Berlin to save whatever could still be saved from the Teuton prehensile hands. The statesman was welcomed as a messenger of good tidings by the Kaiser and his Chancellor and cordial relations were apparently re-established between them. In spite of Witte's relative success the nature of the concrete result of the treaty<sup>1</sup> may be inferred from this one detail which was typical of the remainder. Owing largely to the concessions made by this agreement the Prussian ploughman earned by the same amount of work as his Russian comrade, and with far less risk, 400 per cent. more. The Russian press often reverted to this servitude, characterised it as a crushing war indemnity,<sup>2</sup> and adjured the government not to ratify it for another term of ten years in 1916. From the end of 1913 a puissant agitation was going on all over Russia to hearten and oblige the Tsar's government to adopt a *non possumus* attitude when Germany's demand for the renewal of the treaty for a further period of ten years would be presented to them officially. Everywhere in the Tsardom voices were uplifted against continuing to the Germans these same opportunities of enriching themselves and draining the country economically. In the month of March, 1904, for instance, a congress of South Russian exporters passed a resolution calling upon the Tsar's government to emancipate the Empire from its economic dependence on Germany "which is humiliating for a great power." But the Kaiser's government was firmly resolved, come what might, to insist on the prolongation of the commercial treaty for another decennium. In these mutually incompatible aims lay one of the chief of the proximate causes of the Great War.

But to return to the final negotiations between the German Chancellor and the first plenipotentiary of the Russian government. Witte and Bülow were living at Norderney<sup>3</sup> during the negotiations to suit the Chancellor's convenience.

<sup>1</sup> Concluded in 1904.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the article of A. Stolypin in the *Novoye Vremya* of 4th/17th March, 1914.

<sup>3</sup> An island in the North Sea, province of Hanover.

One evening after the work of the day was over Bülow turned to Witte and said,<sup>1</sup> "The Emperor has a curious and inquiring mind. He is never satisfied unless he can get to the bottom of things. Now one of the every-day mysteries, if I may so term them, which he has not yet fathomed but hopes to solve with your assistance is this: Your Tsar is cold and reserved towards him, and apparently as the result of design rather than temperament. He never unbends. Cordiality whenever it appears is not real. And yet the Kaiser is most attentive to Nicholas II., and has been from the very beginning. He feels drawn towards him. He is never tired of thinking out ways of being agreeable to him. He has sent him several deputations, as you know. But do what he may he never elicits a really warm response. Now the Kaiser wishes me to ask you, who are a past master of psychology, why is that? His Majesty hopes you will shed some light on the subject because by doing this you will be rendering a precious service to your country as well as to ours. All that my sovereign wants to know is what attitude on his part will enable him to establish cordial relations between the two monarchs and therefore between their respective peoples.'

"While Bülow and I were together on that island," Witte said to me parenthetically, "he was receiving every day communications from the Kaiser. I don't remember any day that did not bring at least one. And I had the impression that this awkward question was the result of one of the latest. I answered it in a friendly spirit. But before I did so Von Bülow went on, 'Please speak as frankly as you like. Everything you say will be received with respect and gratitude, and anything that you suggest will be carried out. For we have absolute confidence in you.' I then replied, 'The answer to your question is that the Kaiser does not know the Tsar, does not understand his nature and, consequently, cannot approach him in the right way.' 'And what is the right way?' 'If you like, I will give you a recipe for

<sup>1</sup>What follows was dictated to me by Witte himself, to be used after his death, if I should survive him.

dealing with my sovereign.' 'Please do.' 'But I am not at all sure that I ought. It is a delicate matter, and after all the Kaiser is a man who has his own ideas of people and things.' . . . 'I assure you he will be delighted.' . . . That evening we got no further, because I deemed it best to wait and hear.

"Next evening when we had shaken off the heat and the worries of the day, the Chancellor returned to the charge. 'I can now assure you absolutely that the Kaiser will be truly obliged to you for your diagnosis and advice. He will not take offence. I am speaking this evening with first-hand knowledge.' 'Good, then I will be brief. The Kaiser is too bluff and too patronising. He is hail-fellow-well-met with the Tsar, whose conception of his own dignity and of his rôle in the world is that of the monarchs of the Jewish theocracy. A soft haze of mysticism refracts everything he beholds and magnifies his own functions and person. I am sure the Kaiser has not allowed for this. I daresay he writes, "I advise you, I suggest, etc." If so, he is making a mistake, and in the Tsar's eyes a capital one. What he ought to do is to ask for light, to seek for help, to beg for advice, for co-operation from one whom he recognises as sagacious and far-seeing.

"'If I were the Kaiser and had need of his assistance, I would invent problems to lay before him. I would say, for example, "I am not sure whether it would be wise to dismiss Von Bülow after that last injudicious speech of his in the Reichstag. You who know the world and understand men's motives so thoroughly could advise me. How does it strike you?" Now what your Kaiser does is the very opposite. He treats Nicholas II. as a much younger brother, patronises him, and rubs him the wrong way. I can give you an example. It has come to my knowledge that when the Tsar was last in Darmstadt the two monarchs had a private conversation, during which your Emperor behaved as though he were a very big brother and the Tsar a very little one. Part of the time he held his arm over the shoulder of Nicholas II., and afterwards, too, he overshadowed and eclipsed him. I

believe they were photographed together in that posture. Well, these things hurt.

“‘I will give you one more example, and I shall consider my promise redeemed. Some time ago the Kaiser passed near Darmstadt without visiting the Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig. Now that was a slight. You may say that the Grand Duke is not an equal and that the Kaiser cannot be expected to treat princelets always as though they were emperors. That may be true enough in the abstract, and it may apply to German princes who are this and nothing more, but in this particular case the person offended was the Tsaritsa’s brother, and the sting was indirectly felt by the Tsar himself. These may seem, nay they are, small things, but they tell.’ ” . . .

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE SECRET TREATY OF BJÖRKE—II

TURNING to me Witte said, "I had in my mind at the time, but I did not mention it to Bülow, a much more striking instance which had made very bad blood at the Tsar's court. It was an incident—a characteristic one—which had happened at military manœuvres presided over by the Kaiser. The Grand Duke of Hesse, who took part in them, was being caustically criticised by his war-lord who said, 'So you want to have the Black Eagle conferred on you, I understand? Very well. Show that you deserve it. Answer me a question, but answer it at once and without hesitation. When a hussar mounts his charger which foot must he raise first, the right or the left? Quick!' The Grand Duke did not rise to the occasion. He remained silent. Then the Emperor said, 'You want the Black Eagle and yet are unable to answer a simple question like that,' and with a sneer he left the parade ground. That monologue found its way to Peterhof very shortly afterwards. And it was brooded over. But I kept that to myself." About six months later Bülow thanked Witte fervidly for his advice, which he said was most wise and efficacious. "The Tsar," he added, "has, as you told me, a great store of *amour propre*." "After that," Witte went on, "I must say that the Kaiser's manner towards Nicholas II. was much less overbearing than before. He evidently remembered my recipe. He advised the Tsar not to give way during the Japanese war, but he gave the advice in an acceptable form. But after all he was knocking at an open door. For Nicholas II. hated England then, and for three reasons: first, because of the treaty she had made with Japan which ruined his own political schemes; second, because of English liberalism which sympathised with Russian liberalism and gave asylum to Russian revolutionaries; and third, because of the growing

influence of the Jews in Britain. He sometimes spoke as though all the English were Jews.

"Before I left Norderney I received a letter from the Russian commercial attaché in London, Rutkoffsky, asking me whether I could meet the Japanese minister, Hayashi, with a view to talking over the ways and means of ending the war. Without mentioning this letter, I casually asked Bülow what Germany would think and say if peace were concluded at this conjuncture. He had just received one of the daily communications from the Kaiser. He answered, 'If I were only a friend of Russia's, I would say without hesitation or reserve, "make peace." But Germany is not merely a friend—she is a devoted, a sincere, an intimate, a unique friend of Russia's, and for that reason she cannot give such poisonous advice to her. Make peace indeed!'

"Months passed. As you remember I went to Paris, on my way to Portsmouth, and you went to London to carry my proposals to Hayashi for the Japanese government. France was full of her own troubles just then, of which the source was Berlin and the pretext Morocco. Delcassé had already been dismissed. I saw Rouvier and Loubet. They both counselled me to make peace. I needed no stimulus, however, to move me in that direction. You know what I felt and thought of that accursed war which may yet bring others in its train and ruin some of the cultural achievements of generations. I saw it coming and my exertions to stave it off cost me my post of Finance Minister. When I passed through Paris in 1903 I knew it was imminent and I felt impelled to call on Delcassé, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, and apprise him. But on reflection I gave up the idea because Delcassé would not have believed me. But, instead, I called on Alphonse Rothschild and told him what my forecast was. Rothschild queried, 'Are you quite sure? The reason I ask you is because Delcassé is of the opposite opinion and I should like to have something more than one opinion balancing another. He swears there will be no war.' I answered that I had unfortunately no doubt.

"France, were she better informed, might have prevented



that wanton slaughter—almost without an effort. And she ought to have prevented it in her own interests, for of all the non-belligerent nations she had most to lose by it. To England it seemed rather a gain because it would weaken her old enemies and render them both more amenable to reason in the future. To Germany it would bring no loss and some important advantages, such as the commercial treaty. It would also relieve her of the necessity of preparing for a war on two fronts which was the constant fear before the eyes of the Berlin statesmen. Austria considered it a boon, the like of which would probably never return for centuries. And Aehrenthal's merit lay in his clear perception of that fact and the promptitude with which he acted on it. France alone stood to lose tremendously by Russia's defeat. Her savings were invested in Russian enterprises. Her prestige and international status depended largely on our military strength. But the statesmen of the republic saw nothing, felt nothing, suspected nothing. By the beginning of 1905 the upshot was outlined with painful distinctness. Russia was worsted, the balance of European power was upset, and France's specific gravity had fallen low.

"France had to find a substitute for what she had lost in the Japanese war, and she turned towards England. This was a good enough move in the circumstances. My criticism of it is that Delcassé allowed himself to be dictated to by circumstances instead of taking them in hand and directing them. The Anglo-French understanding, which you had so often advocated, was at last realised and the Kaiser was incensed to find himself confronted with an accomplished fact instead of being told all about it at the outset. A friend of mine and of his said to him, 'There is nothing in it except what everybody knows. And that is harmless enough.' But the Kaiser replied, 'If that be so, why was it hidden from me? The concealment makes me suspect something that has not emerged into the light. And whether or no it is there I am warranted in suspecting it.'

"Then Wilhelm devised the Morocco incident in order to punish France and test England's loyalty to the republic.

I know that he did not believe that the English would stand by their late opponents so soon after Fashoda, and he was not alone in his estimate. But events belied it. That was his first mistake. Holstein, the spider who spun his webs in the Berlin twilight, held the opposite view and left no stone unturned to move his government to act upon it. But the Kaiser went his own way, as he so often does. His visit to Tangier and all that came of that is universally believed to have been the execution of a plan drawn up with deliberation and neatness. But although his ultimate aims were definite and can be reconstructed to-day without fear of error—I have amused myself by putting them in sequence—the details were often left to chance, and his fateful visit to Tangier was one of these details. It may be said that these particulars possess meagre historic interest, but they characterise the man and help one to appreciate his policy. Well, I can tell you that he never intended to make that extraordinary visit until his yacht had actually left Lisbon, and he did not intend to land even when the yacht was in the roadstead opposite Tangier until a French marine officer, very innocently, encouraged him by giving a sanguine view of the state of wind and wave and weather. That is an absolute fact. . . .<sup>1</sup>

“The Kaiser’s visit became a landmark of history, however, and Europe had to reckon with its consequences. These might have been less painful for the republic if its statesmen had displayed more self-discipline and less levity. But we must take people as they are, and Clémenceau was true to himself when he unburdened his mind and stated that France, according to the War Minister, was not prepared for war. No doubt it was a rash course to run the risk of a war with no allies except a prostrate Russia and an England who could help France only with her ships and, as the Kaiser brutally put it, ‘could not save Paris.’ Still bluff was a possible game, but that was not exactly the way to play it.

“When I reached Paris, on my way to the United States,

<sup>1</sup> I have had this story, together with all the details, from two other independent and absolutely trustworthy sources.

the people there were engrossed by the Morocco business and by Germany's daring and successful intervention in the internal politics of France. And undoubtedly it was an amazing spectacle. The removal of Delcassé, then a popular minister, in a country which was proud of being democratic in spirit and a republic in form, was a marvellous achievement. True, it was effected only with the co-operation of the French themselves. But they co-operated with zeal and perseverance. Rouvier hated Delcassé and wholly disapproved his policy as chauvinistic, and the Germans, who are single-minded and united, played off the one politician against the other, and gained their ends without changing or even modifying their own plans for either. The only modification they made came later, after my return from the Peace Conference at Portsmouth, and then it was brought to pass by my intervention. I may say that my short-lived friendly relations with the Kaiser enabled me to ward off a European war. The play of democratic institutions in France and Italy—I know England far too little to be able to speak with first-hand knowledge on the subject—is a comedy and will continue to be a comedy until it becomes a tremendous tragedy. It is a repetition on a more moderate scale of the unedifying doings that went on in Poland shortly before the first partition. Or look at it if you will in this way: The Germans are aiming at the same kind of influence over so-called democratic countries of Europe that Russia and England are actually exercising in Persia—they hope for a victory to be scored by intelligence, system, and organisation over ignorance, incompetence, and lack of cohesiveness. If the conditions continue unchanged the odds are big in favour of Germany. Cannot your statesmen be got to realise that? . . . Or has Fate taken the matter out of their hands?

"The newspapers in Paris published a telegram somewhere about 24th-25th July, I don't remember the exact date, announcing that the Kaiser had gone in his yacht on a visit to the Tsar to Björke. Rouvier was very disquieted at the news and asked me what it meant. 'How is it possible,'

he exclaimed, 'that our ally can demonstrate his friendship, private or public, for the man who is playing havoc with France's policy and her peace of mind, and is behaving as an enemy who has not yet declared war against us only because he is not sure that all the circumstances are auspicious?' I quieted Rouvier as best I could, saying that the Tsar is not merely loyal but is punctiliously so, that I felt certain the visit was one of courtesy and that it was imposed on him by the Kaiser—as it really turned out to be—and that if he had declined it the consequences would probably be as unpleasant to France as to Russia. I talked for some time in this conventional style, but I did not feel assured myself. I resembled a lawyer pleading from a brief sent by a shady solicitor. While I was talking to the Premier, all the circumstances of the Kiao Chow incident unrolled themselves before my mind's eyes: I saw the two monarchs with important mien playing with the lives of a multitude of men, and one of them hardly conscious of his responsibility, but both deeming themselves to be beings of a different species from their fellow-mortals. I also remembered the Kaiser's question, which Bülow put to me at Norderney, as to how he should tackle the Tsar, and I wondered whether the Tsar had again allowed himself to be duped. On reflection, however, I persuaded myself that that could hardly be, because there was nothing mischievous left for him to do—so far as I could then see. But Rouvier, whose thoughts ran on other lines, was excited, and raising his voice exclaimed, 'How could such a thing be possible? When you were leaving Petersburg was it arranged? Did the Tsar tell you anything about it?' 'No, it was not arranged. If it had been I should most certainly have known from the Minister of Foreign Affairs. But I will telegraph to him at once.'

"I telegraphed to Lamsdorff, and received a statement from him by letter which, as well as I remember, was written before he could have received my telegraphic inquiry. You can verify the dates in my papers."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Witte's surmise was correct. Lamsdorff's letter bears the date of the 8th/21st July, 1905.

Witte received Lamsdorff's letter from Professor Martens. It enclosed a copy of the government instructions to Baron Rosen and contains the following characteristic reference to the famous interview at Björke. I translate it literally: "In the evening of the 6th/19th July, his Majesty the Emperor received a telegram from Kaiser Wilhelm, from the eastern coast of Sweden, with contents of a most obliging character. At the end of it<sup>1</sup> the German Kaiser added, 'I should be happy to have the possibility of meeting the Emperor *unceremoniously*!' "<sup>2</sup> Considering that such an interview would be most useful and important at the conjuncture through which we are passing, his Majesty gladly consented and proposed to Wilhelm that he should repair to Björkesund, not far from Vyborg. The meeting will take place on Sunday, 10th/23rd July, towards evening, and will probably extend over a day and a half. It is unnecessary that I should accompany the Emperor because Bülow is not cruising with the Kaiser Wilhelm.

"I am of opinion that this event can produce only a good impression and one that is advantageous to us. Provided always that Wilhelm does not contrive to elicit one or other of those assurances and amicable promises which he afterwards knows how to exploit in such a masterly way.

"I hope that you will have an opportunity of explaining to the French that the coming together of the two emperors has an exclusively friendly and family character. One among other evidences of this is the absence of their Ministers of Foreign Affairs. In any case, for France the impending conversations of the two monarchs cannot be other than helpful."

How helpful they were the public knows by this time. It may not be amiss to reproduce here the exact text of the telegram in which the Kaiser practically invited himself to the Tsar's dominions. It is in the Emperor's English which diverges occasionally from the King's:

<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact the telegram is much shorter than Lamsdorff's reference to it would lead one to infer.

<sup>2</sup> In Lamsdorff's letter this word is also underlined.

"I shall shortly be on my return journey<sup>1</sup> and cannot pass across entrance of Finnish sea without sending you best love and wishes. Should it give you any pleasure to see me either on shore or your yacht of course am always at your disposal. I would come as simple tourist without any fêtes."

The Tsar replied at once as follows: "Delighted with your proposition. Would it suit you to meet at Björkesund near Vyborg, a pleasant quiet place, living on board our yachts? In these serious times I cannot go far from the capital. Of course our meeting will be quite simple and homely. Looking forward with intense pleasure to see you. Nicky." From Nyland the Kaiser replied on 7th/20th July as follows: "Most happy. Would it suit you if I arrived at your anchorage—Björkesund—on Sunday, 10th/23rd, evening? My yacht draws six and half metres water, would be thankful for a trustworthy pilot to lead us through the entrance. Please to communicate where you will anchor. Have kept the whole matter quite secret, so that my gentlemen on board even know nothing; also at home nobody informed.<sup>2</sup> Am so delighted to be able to see you. Hope you will not be disturbed by my Nordland's Gessellschaft who always accompany me since fifteen years. Best love. Willy." After that the following three despatches passed between the pair before they came together on the historic evening of the 23rd: "Shall be Sunday, 10th/23rd, afternoon, at Björkesund. Have given orders about trustworthy pilot. Place of anchorage will be between the islands of Björke and Kavitzä. Till now have kept our planned meeting secret. So happy to see you. Wish you a smooth passage. Best love. Nicky."

"Most obliged, expect to arrive on 23rd (10th) at seven evening. Please let pilot meet us off Hochland. Nobody has slightest idea of meeting; only my captain, who is

<sup>1</sup> This message was sent from a little Swedish port on the Gulf of Bothnia to the north of Stockholm.

<sup>2</sup> Exactly as when he was on his way to Tangier, with this difference, that on that occasion he had not made up his own mind until the very last minute.

ordered to keep absolute secrecy. All my guests under impression of going to Visby in Gothland. I am overjoyed at seeing you again. Have most important news for you. The faces of my guests will be worth seeing when they suddenly behold your yacht! A fine lark! Tableaux! Which dress for the meeting? Willy."

"Steamer with pilots shall await your arrival at south end of island Hochland 10th/23rd July at sunrise. Micha will accompany me. Best love. Nicky."

Before touching upon the correspondence that had gone before, and of which the meeting and the work accomplished thereat were but the climax, it will be well to quote two more allusions to the interview which Witte received during his absence from Russia. The Finance Minister, Kokofftseff, telegraphing to him about the scheme for a consultative chamber, to be called the Duma, adds: "All the time the Emperor is in good humour, being manifestly cheered up after his meeting with the German Kaiser."<sup>1</sup>

Count Lamsdorff in a letter dated 16th/29th July, which he sent to Witte through the intermediary of the naval officer Russin, writes: "The Emperor was extraordinarily pleased with his interview with Kaiser Wilhelm, who in reality, however, talked little about the war, but expressed himself in favour of concluding peace with a view to restoring order in the interior of Russia. What seemingly touched the Tsar was Wilhelm's proclaiming his firm confidence in the invulnerability of Russia's might. He considers the present ferment superficial, and believes that it can easily be made to subside. I do not know how far this optimism is sincere, but by means of it an excellent impression was made on the Emperor.

"They talked of the affairs of Norway-Sweden and of the relations with France, with whom the Emperor Wilhelm considers it possible to establish closer intercourse after the removal of Delcassé, etc., etc. It is my opinion that these friendly assurances will lead up to more or less definite

<sup>1</sup>The date of this message is 23rd July (5th August), 1905.

demands, on which it behoves us to look with the utmost circumspection.”<sup>1</sup>

How the French government professed to look upon the Björke interview appears from a confidential report that lies before me from an eminent diplomatist who will recognise the words of his own telegram to his government.<sup>2</sup> “With regard to the visit of the German to the Russian Emperor the French Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs told me that the Russian government had not notified it, and that M. Witte was not informed of it before quitting St. Petersburg, and that it was only after the meeting of the two emperors that the French government was apprised that the Kaiser had requested the Tsar to be allowed to pay him a visit of cordial amity. The Minister of Foreign Affairs assured me that M. Witte had called on him to explain on behalf of Count Lamsdorff that the interview of the two emperors was devoid of political character, and that nobody could pretend to know the particulars of the conversation that had taken place between the two sovereigns, although the rumour had been spread that Germany was aiming at getting France to strike up an understanding with her in order to act together in concert on the Far Eastern question.

“I availed myself of the opportunity to ask the Minister of Foreign Affairs for some information on this subject. He assured me categorically that no advances had been made to the French government, and that he himself was formally opposed to any such understanding, inasmuch as he preferred to have his hand entirely free on these questions.<sup>3</sup> . . . Having learned that M. Witte had seen the ambassador of Germany in France I called on him shortly after my interview with the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The ambassador of Germany in France told me that . . . he could not

<sup>1</sup> As yet Lamsdorff knew nothing about the secret alliance concluded by the two emperors.

<sup>2</sup> I withhold as irrelevant the name of the statesman, merely affirming that his report was laid before me at a time when I had not the honour of his acquaintance.

<sup>3</sup> This was so obvious that I wonder the Russian ambassador in Paris should have had to announce it formally to Lamsdorff.



understand how Russians like Witte could misunderstand the actual situation.<sup>1</sup> Respecting the meeting of the monarchs he told me that it was a visit of courtesy and that it would be a grave error on the part of the French to ascribe real importance to it. According to a telegram which he had received he thinks he is warranted in saying that the Tsar was entirely satisfied with the meeting. But the circumstance that Russia and Germany are striving to belittle as far as possible the significance of this visit seems, to me, on the contrary, to prove that the meeting of the two emperors possesses some importance. . . . I saw the ambassador of England in France, and he told me that the meeting of the two emperors was perhaps intended to prepare a cooling down of the relations between France and Russia, Germany having already had recourse to that policy in Morocco to sunder France from England. . . .”

The Kaiser's verbal profession of faith in the firmness of Russia's might was repeated in a telegram he sent to the Tsar less than a week after the interview,<sup>2</sup> in the course of which he wrote: “I venture to advise promulgating (*sic*) Bouliguine Bill<sup>3</sup> as soon as possible. So that the representatives be elected soon. Meanwhile, till that has taken place, the peace conference will have been opened and the conditions become known for both sides.” How thoughtful he was of the monarchist principle even abroad, and of the policy of attributing all individual successes to the sovereign, may be inferred from the following allusion to Witte's peace negotiations: “With the actual spirit prevailing in Russia, the disaffected masses would try to place the whole responsibility for all disadvantageable (*sic*) consequences on your

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.*, in its bearings on the necessity of concluding peace without delay. I omit the passages irrelevant to the meeting of the monarchs. I need hardly say that the diplomatist whose words I am quoting was and is unaware that I was put in possession of his despatch soon after he had sent it.

<sup>2</sup> On the 16th/29th July.

<sup>3</sup> This was a project for the introduction of a representative assembly with a consultative voice in legislation. It held the field until Witte and the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevitch wrested the legislative Duma from the Tsar in October, 1905. It is to Bouliguine's scheme that the Kaiser alludes in his telegrams when he writes of “The Great Duma.”

shoulders and the successes as results on Witte's personal manage (*sic*). It would be excellent as a first task for these representatives, if you gave them the treaty of peace after it has been formulated, to vote upon; thus leaving the odium of the decision to the country and thereby giving the Russian people a voice in the matter of their own prosperity, which they so much wish for. The outcome would be their work and therefore stop the mouths of the opposition. Best love to Alice. Willy."

In this secret meeting with the Kaiser and the extra secret doings to which it led we again find the stream of tendency in the matter of Russia's most momentous dealings with foreign countries canalised and regulated, not by some far-seeing statesman or in accordance with any general instructions attributed to Peter, but by the changing whims of a puny whipster, of whom the best that one can say is that he knew not what he did. Befogged with fantastic ideas fostered by his courtiers, he worshipped himself as the source of all political wisdom and ignored even those whom he himself had chosen to advise him. His letters and the remarks he penned across various reports which are in my possession depict him as a man whose mind was affected by the mania of greatness. He resented every human endeavour to enlighten him. From the viewless spirits, indeed, he was willing enough to accept lessons whether they came through a table, a planchette, a medium, or a hypnotiser like Rasputin, but from a mere mortal, however experienced and clear-eyed, he would brook nothing short of acquiescence and obedience. A man of Witte's vehement pulsing force he could not tolerate in his environment, and even the meek and mild Lamsdorff, who felt himself exalted "in bowing down before the Lord's anointed," however he might counsel and plead and expostulate,<sup>1</sup> was not even

<sup>1</sup> Only once, so far as I know, did Lamsdorff venture on anything resembling an expostulation. It was after Nicholas II. had plunged his country into war and it took the form of a most loyal submission respecting a series of "justificative" documents which the Bezobrazoff gang had printed, and from which the minister learned for the first time how cunningly and wickedly he had been deceived by his imperial master. I possessed all these documents since the year 1905.

listened to. He was the Emperor's tippet. Nicholas II. had no minister, Russia no leader. And his schemes were secret, his plans mysterious, his State actions clandestine. His very glance was furtive. Although most people around him had sounded his intelligence and plumbed his character, nobody whom I met understood him so perfectly as Witte. Not only could he describe graphically the workings of the Emperor's mind from their manifestations in his looks, words, gait, gestures, and voice, but he could often foretell his attitude in circumstances which were about to occur for the first time. The greatness, physical, mental, and moral, of Witte added the element of the grotesque to the smallness, the pettiness, and the pithlessness of his sovereign. "He has the slyness of the maniac, and also the method and the stubbornness," he used to say to me. "There is no trace of high spirit in anything he undertakes. His best actions are done as though his conscience pictured them as shameful crimes." But this solvent analysis did not impair the statesman's loyalty or sense of duty.

One day Witte and I stood on the captain's bridge on the steamer that was conveying us to New York looking down upon a crowd of Czechs, Hungarians, Italians, Norwegians, Swedes, and Germans sprawling about on the third-class deck. "Look at these people," Witte said. "There must be, there certainly is, something radically wrong in the civilisation that throws them up as scum to its surface. You may say that they are not the dregs of that society. True, but that only darkens the colours in which I behold the sinister phenomenon. If the nations of the earth would only consent to abandon war as a means of settling international disputes, what a spring-tide of improvement we should experience! I don't claim that you can do away with violence once for all in this imperfect world of ours. But you can narrow its sphere surprisingly." "By another Hague Conference?" I inquired. "Don't mention that ignoble sham, I loathe the name of it," he exclaimed. "But listen and tell me what you think of what I am going to say.

"When Kaiser Wilhelm paid his first visit to Petersburg

after his accession to the throne I saw him and we talked, as you and I are talking now, feeling after some solution to the great social problems which are far more pressing than most of our trumpery issues. I remember one occasion in particular on which we discussed the differences between Europe and America with a view to examining the source of the advantages which the United States enjoy. It was in the German Embassy. The Kaiser said:

“You, M. Witte, are a European authority on tariff and railway matters. Have you, in the course of your researches, ever gone into the subject of what should be the normal economic relations between the two continents, Europe and America?” ‘No, sire. But I am not sure that I have seized the drift of your question.’ ‘Well, I’ll put it more concretely. Did you ever reflect that America is living on Europe, drawing the life-sap from its peoples, and that the process, unless it be stopped in time, may end in prostration? Now how can you stop it? There is only one effectual way, by checking the influx of agricultural produce and manufactured wares from the United States. I don’t, of course, mean a complete and formal boycott, but a high tariff that would cause the importation curve to drop heavily.’ ‘No, sire. I never thought of that, and now that you speak of it I am afraid it may prove difficult to find a suitable place for it among the ideas that lodge in my brain. For with the people of the United States we in Russia are on friendly terms. Interest as well as sentiment impel us to remain on this good footing. If we were to wage a tariff war against them I realise what we should lose, but I cannot see what we should gain. So far as Russia is concerned, there would be neither motive nor aim in the measure.’ ‘You are mistaken in thinking that it should be directed against the United States in particular. What I have in mind, and what could and should be done in the interests of all our continental peoples, is to levy a high tariff on all non-European wares. The American would then be liable as well as those of the other continents.’

“That strikes me,” I objected, ‘as primarily a political

rather than an economic scheme, and it would, I feel convinced, make bad blood between the peoples affected. Our aim it has always seemed to me ought to be to bring together not to estrange. Ever since England's war against the people of the United States that people and we have been fast friends. And we wish to remain their friends in the future. If I am right in assuming that at the root of your Majesty's suggestion lies the sundering of the economical from the political question, then I am with you. Thus while I see no harm in our eating American bread, fruits, and other foods, I see no good in our spending so much European money on preparations for war that too little remains for these necessities and for cultural purposes!

"'It may be true,' I went on, 'that the importation of American corn challenges and deserves attention. The budgetary estimates appear to point in that direction. But even so, that to my thinking is only an imaginary danger or, at the worst, a very overrated one. The real peril lies in Europe itself and consists in the never-ending strife and feuds and wars, and worse than all in the noxious atmosphere of militarism which is asphyxiating the foremost peoples of the world. Militarism brings socialism in its train, and socialism breeds anarchism. The fact is that the armed peace of to-day is a thinly disguised war—but a war against civilisation. That is the cancer which is eating away the vital organs of the nations. So appalling are the sacrifices it necessitates that war itself would hardly be worse.' I remember suddenly thinking that my words would sound like a sermon in the Kaiser's ears and I stopped short, but he said, 'Please complete your thought.' I went on:

"'Against whom are we making ready for war? Not against America, but unhappily against one another. Do we gain anything by these wars? Nothing. In the meanwhile America and other overseas countries profit by these our intestine feuds. And by dint of thus losing the best of what she has and is, Europe will, in time, resemble an elderly lady who once was beautiful as well as young, and is now esteemed only for her past. And if this anarchism is

allowed to continue long enough, Europe as an aggregate of political communities will have ceased to exist. It cannot be otherwise.'

" 'Then you don't approve the idea of our agreeing about a European tariff against America, or say rather non-European produce and manufactures?' 'No, sire. If we cannot agree to strive after real and accessible boons we shall not unite on the more difficult problem of making sacrifices for imaginary or inaccessible advantages. What strikes me forcibly is the wonderful transformation that union or association would effect in the political and economic ordering of Europe. If our continent were one empire or one republic'—the Kaiser looked sharply at me when I pronounced the word republic, but he probably saw that in my thought it contained no application to actual politics—'her voice would be respectfully hearkened to throughout the world. The heavy taxes that are waxing heavier every year would become very perceptibly lighter or else would purchase invaluable boons in lieu of shells and guns. Europe would be a syndicate run for the benefit of the whole community. And what is more, that syndicate could govern, or let us say guide, the world. But instead of realising that bright perspective, we in Europe are at the mercy of each other to-day and may be at the mercy of America to-morrow and of Japan the day after. For while Europe is decaying new States are springing up. The United States was but an English colony a brief while ago. Now she is a world-power. Japan was a tiny island State quite recently. She is still very weak, but is growing and may become much stronger and even very strong in time.'

"The Kaiser said, 'I am delighted to hear you unfold such excellent ideas because I agree with them in essence. But schemes are tested by their execution and their working. How do you count on realising yours? Look around upon Europe. You know how precarious the equilibrium is and how far we still are from stability. Propose a workable scheme. Mine is to make the continent strong by keeping out ruinous American exploitation. But I want to hear

yours.' 'I, sire, would make all Europe one.' 'All Europe?' 'I mean continental Europe. England would have to be left out. She cannot become a member of the federation so long as she is a purely maritime power. Her geographical situation separates her from the continental States. If she had constructed the tunnel under the Channel and were thus joined with France her status would be different. Then she, too, would be a member of the United States of Europe. To-day she is not European. The sea severs while it defends her from the Continent.'

"'There,' exclaimed the Kaiser—who at that time was an ardent champion of an understanding with England—'you and I are no longer at one. England is quite as much European as any continental State and may think herself more so than some; anyhow she must be got to join. Her adherence is a necessity. A United States of Europe with England left out would never do.' 'I do not insist, sire. All that I aspire after is the cessation of armaments by eradicating their causes. And that could be accomplished by the strenuous co-ordinated endeavour of the foremost minds of civilised nations.' 'That is precisely what I am trying to bring about. I want to do away with wars between European States and I think I see my way. But, as you say, the co-operation of the leading spirits of all countries is desirable. May I count on your help when the time comes?' 'Yes, sire. I shall esteem myself happy to contribute in any degree to the attainment of such a desirable end. But I think time is needed. A social organism cannot be transformed in a hurry otherwise than superficially. And we need something more than that.' 'Truly, time is requisite to weld the nations of Europe into a federation. But we cannot make too great haste to take the first step. Afterwards no power or continent will dare to question the behests of Europe. Economically and politically we shall lead the human race. Do you agree?' 'Yes, sire, I agree to everything except the boycotting of America. I also hold that economic and political measures must be studied apart. My idea is to begin the work by trying a political experiment,

not an economic one, to bring together Russia, France, and Germany with as little laboured effort as possible, and that done we shall have gone far towards achieving the high purpose for which you are working. France's adherence, however, is a necessity. With her partnership and co-operation we cannot dispense. Your Majesty adds England. All the better if that be possible. I even go further and say that the first aim must be the establishment of a United States of Europe. But if we were to begin by what would be considered a tariff war on America, I doubt whether we should make much headway.'

"That was our conversation, as far as I can recall it now. But I have it in writing somewhere and if you remind me on our return home I will show it to you. It made a profound impression on me at the time. But let me add a curious detail which is worth remembering because characteristic. The conversation must have made a deep dent on the Kaiser's mind or else he wanted to make capital out of it, for he at once wrote out an account of it—a one-sided account in which my objections were slurred over or omitted, some of my views weakened, my plea for bringing France into the federation not mentioned, and worst of all a series of sophisticated arguments put forward for inaugurating an economic boycott of America. And this memorandum he presented to the Tsar. At that time the Kaiser was bitten with a mania for eliminating America from the European markets. Is it not odd that in his memorandum to the Tsar he should have passed over in silence my objections to his plan, and also everything I had uttered about France?

"The Tsar smiled as he handed me the Kaiser's memoir, and said, 'Read it at your leisure and tell me what you think of it. The Kaiser is full of it and wants to indoctrinate me. Jot down your views' briefly when you have time. I don't agree with him.' Of course I had time. Having read the paper carefully I went over the ground and with ease demolished the sophisms with which Wilhelm bolstered up his plea for boycotting the United States. When I next



went to the palace to report to the Tsar I put the case in a nutshell and he accepted my view and thanked me. He smiled when I grew animated in arguing and said that he was already convinced.

"The fact is that at this period of his reign the Kaiser was visibly drawn towards England and earnestly desired an accord with that country. That explains why he reacted the moment I remarked that England being an island and having purely maritime interests to further and safeguard would hardly be qualified for membership of the League of European States until her territory was linked by a tunnel under the Channel to the Continent. He stopped me at once and fired off his objections one after the other until I gave way and said that the aim was of greater importance than the means. In later years he vacillated between England and Russia, uncertain with which one of the two he had better strike a bargain. As soon as he decided to weaken Russia he pushed her into the Far Eastern swamp. Of this I am absolutely sure. It was he who laid the snare into which the Tsar fell. It was he who countered and thwarted my policy of peaceful penetration and no annexation. It was he who during this very visit duped the Tsar and got him to agree to the virtual annexation of Kiao Chow. Nay, only think of it, at the very time when I was gravely discussing with him the ways and means of setting Europe on a platform from which she could move towards a higher plane of progress, in the belief that this ennobling care was engrossing his thoughts, the unscrupulous schemer was victimising the Tsar behind my back, pulverising the groundwork of my policy, and sowing the seed that has since sprung up as armed men. Wilhelm II. is the author of the war which we are on our way to America to terminate. That man has a heavy load on his conscience, but let us hope that he, at least, believes he is doing the best he can under difficult circumstances. . . ."

That monologue of Witte's, as he stood beside me on the captain's bridge, made a deep impression on me. I wrote it down and had it typed by my secretary, and I told Witte

that he would do well to bring forward these ideas of his from time to time in his public utterances. "I am afraid," he objected, "they would do more harm than good. Being too early is as harmful as being too late. Everything has its season. People do not take the time to reflect, they most often label a man erroneously. Your people in England, for example, regard me as anti-English. And that is wholly false." I said that perhaps a few might be under this wrong impression, but only a few. He answered, "Only the few that matter. I know for certain that all the crowned heads who are relatives or friends of the Tsar have been assured by him that I am a man *not to be trusted*. Those are the exact words used by him and repeated by them. In England they have been amplified and I am set down as a friend to Germany and an enemy to your country. That is false, as you know. You and I may and do differ in our ideas about the way to reconstruct Europe, socially and politically, but we are at one as to the final aim. And you have never taken me for an enemy to the British people. You often say that I am mistaken in my judgment of British policy. And you are probably right. But I greatly admire English ideas and methods. What I want, however, is to solve a certain problem practically. And my way of doing it is by grouping the great powers of the Continent together. The most difficult aspect of it is to obtain the adhesion of France. This could be effected if Germany were wise even to the extent of discerning her own interests and behaving in the political domain as a farmer does in the agricultural. When he drops the seed into the earth he resigns himself to see nothing more of it for a season. And he reaps the harvest in the fulness of time. If I were in the Kaiser's place, it is not the question of Alsace and Lorraine that would keep me from knitting Europe into a federal State. And yet I am not blind to the difficulties in the way."

Once or twice again during our absence from Europe Witte reverted to this theme, and then it faded from my vision until after our return. When we were on our way home and nearing Portsmouth I renewed the request I had

often made to him that he would land in England and make himself acquainted with persons and institutions there,<sup>1</sup> especially as he would probably be entrusted with the government of Russia and could not but profit by a personal knowledge of the country and the people with whom the Tsar's ministers would of necessity have to come into frequent contact. He agreed with my proposal in the abstract, but regretted that for purely formal reasons it could not be carried out. Despatched by the Emperor on a special mission it was, he said, his duty, having performed it, to go straight back to Russia and report to his sovereign. Only the Tsar could dispense him from that duty, and he himself could not fitly ask for a dispensation. He promised, however, to visit England with me later if the internal condition of Russia, which disquieted him greatly, left him free to do so.

At Portsmouth I took leave of Witte who continued his journey to France. What he saw, heard, and undertook to do there, and the nature of the services which he rendered to the republic, will one day be confided in detail to the historian. On learning Witte's attitude in all these and kindred transactions, and the zeal with which he always threw himself into the service of France, the reader will be inclined to admit that some of the cut-and-dried stock labels which had been hastily affixed to the one statesman Russia has possessed since Peter the Great are but tokens of the ignorance and incompetence of those who employ them. Witte was above all things else a Russian and one of the nation's most perfect types.

Returning to the origins of the secret treaty and the curious way in which it came to light, I shall endeavour to reproduce the story as far as possible in Witte's own words.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Later on I repeated the suggestion and once I was on the point of succeeding. I wrote to friends in England, some of whom kindly promised to entertain him, but one of them—the one from whom I had expected most—showed symptoms of hesitation, and the matter dropped.

<sup>2</sup> I possess everything in writing, but not every document is actually accessible to me now. I kept them in safe places during my travels, and I could not always lay my hands on them at a moment's notice. It is a remarkable fact that a few years later Witte's memory played him false in certain matters with which he was never really conversant. I have

His success at Portsmouth (U.S.A.) had made his name famous throughout the world. Every country was anxious to have him as its guest, and every cabinet desirous of winning his friendship. But as usual the British Foreign Office, true to its hallowed traditions, approached him along the old diplomatic road which he cordially detested. The cabinet knew that I was Witte's intimate friend and adviser, that it was I whom he chose to open negotiations with Japan, and later on to request King Edward to visit the Tsar at Reval or elsewhere, and to help him in all his undertakings, home and foreign, but never once did they apply to me for any assistance or advice. Over and over again I listened with pain to his severe and merited strictures called forth by some of their ill-advised acts, but I did not venture to tread on ground that was holy.<sup>1</sup>

"At Portsmouth," Witte said, as soon as I rejoined him in Petersburg, "I received two invitations which I deeply appreciated. One tended towards the fulfilment of your wish that I should disembark in England, repair to London, and see your men of light and leading. It was issued on behalf of King Edward and was presented by that sovereign's friend, the Councillor of the Russian Embassy in London, Poklevsky-Kozel.<sup>2</sup> This diplomatist also brought a series of proposals respecting a projected agreement between Russia and England which, he told me,

some curious examples of this. In one case I showed him published accounts of a political transaction in which he had played a prominent part—accounts incompatible with his own. He declined to accept them. I then told him an official statement had appeared which ran counter to his. He at once exclaimed: "Please write to my dictation a full account of what took place from start to finish." I did. But although correct in every other particular, it is absolutely wrong in that important one. His memory was at fault.

<sup>1</sup> Once only I was requested by a diplomatist, who was a personal friend of mine, not by the Foreign Office, to induce the Russian government to appoint a certain individual to the post of minister plenipotentiary to a country where diplomatic disputes were frequent. I asked Witte to get Lamsdorff to appoint the man and he did so. If my friend had foreseen what would come of it, he would not have made the request. He and the Russian diplomatist whom I had had sent as minister quarrelled hopelessly and the latter had to be recalled by M. Izvolsky.

<sup>2</sup> A diplomatist of real worth whose career in Teheran and Bucharest was brilliant and useful.

had the approval of the King and the Foreign Office. It dealt with the various countries in which the political interests of the two empires do not run parallel and with designs which are resented by one side and more or less sincerely repudiated by the other. In a word it was, or might have been, the practical outcome of your articles on the possibility of an accord between the two empires.

"I told Poklevsky that I felt highly honoured by the invitation which the King had so graciously sent me and deeply grieved that I could not avail myself of it, because being the State Secretary of the Tsar I am bound to go straight home, unless his Majesty ordains otherwise. Perhaps I may be fortunate enough to see England and her King at a later date. Thereupon Poklevsky asked me to read and to give him my opinion about the project of an accord between Russia and Great Britain which he laid before me. He said that I was the Premier designate of the new dispensation. I read it through very quickly. It reminded me of your own written and verbal proposals for an Entente, the part about Persia was, I believe, almost the same. It turned upon the East, Tibet, Persia, Afghanistan, and other places. Well, I had to tell Poklevsky what I had so often repeated to you about these plans. I said, 'I am not a diplomatist, at least not a professional one, and my views will not help you. I had much rather you submitted the scheme to Count Lamsdorff. It is he who will have to report on the subject to the Tsar as soon as the question has ripened. Still, if you insist on my judgment, you are welcome to it. The provisions made here for removing the causes of friction between Russia and England are, I should say, most moderate and do credit to their distinguished author. Personally I should be disposed to give Great Britain considerably more than she demands in this paper, at any rate, when working out the details. I would certainly make larger concessions in Persia.<sup>1</sup> The English sense of measure is most

<sup>1</sup> The same or similar language was addressed to the British ambassador by the Tsar's Minister of Foreign Affairs, M. Izvolsky, when the scheme finally came up for discussion. But the British government on behalf of the Indian government declined to take all that Russia was willing to offer,

commendable. But I am opposed to alliances. Don't misinterpret me. I am fond of England. The character, the temperament of that people appeal to me strongly perhaps by contrast with my own, and I am penetrated with the conviction that the two nations must live and work in peace and amity. Those, therefore, who hallmark me as Anglophobe are maligners. It is false that I approve any design, any policy, calculated to cause friction between London and Petersburg. What is true is that I favour a different method from yours. That is all. But unhappily mischief-makers have built upon that fact the fiction that I am an enemy of Great Britain.

"The truth is I have always pleaded for freedom from entanglements in our relations with foreign countries. In that we ought, I hold, to imitate the United States. On principle I would not bind our hands unless constrained by necessity. No close relations, no Entente for me, with any country whatever for the moment. Nothing piecemeal. Abstinence from patchwork alliances would strengthen Russia incalculably.<sup>1</sup> I inculcated this principle on Alexander III. who told me that he endorsed every word I had said on the subject. And he made it an axiom of his policy. So, too, did Nicholas II. when he first ascended the throne. I know for a fact that the Kaiser let him understand that he would like a formal treaty, but the Tsar, mindful of his father's line of action, fought shy of it. And I hope he will continue faithful to this avoidance of complications. You may ask, if that be so, how I can uphold the alliance with France. My answer is, I did not make it. I found it ready-made. I will go further, however, and say that it was an historic necessity, just as our commercial treaty with

This sounds incredible, but it is true. They might have had Ispahan in the British sphere of influence. I do not mention this refusal by way of reproach. What is, however, blameworthy is the fact that a couple of years after the convention was ratified, the British government asked for some of the things which it had rejected. And it received a refusal. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Witte, as I pointed out before, was always preoccupied lest his country should be drawn into war, because he realised how badly prepared it was and also how deep its fall after a defeat would be owing to the high position which it occupied in consequence of its unmerited prestige.

Germany was a necessity. It had to be accepted. It had grown slowly until at last it forced itself upon the two peoples and took the form of a military convention. And now it is part of the foundation of the loose international State-system of Europe. Let it stand, therefore, as an unquestionable postulate. But let it be the only tie of the kind until Europe is transfigured. Even with France our relations are not what they might and should be. They are too casual, too little organic, not properly adjusted to the ends. That is a defect that I should like to see remedied. But the alliance with France was a necessity and for the time being no other alliance is.

“Please assure King Edward that among Russian statesmen in and outside the cabinet England has no more sincere friend than myself. For my country I desire a close and excellent working understanding with the British people, and I am certain we shall achieve that in the near future. But no political partnerships. I cannot second any effort to bring them about. On principle I will discountenance them all.’

“That was the tenor of my answer. King Edward when he received it misunderstood it, as I feared he would. He did not believe in my friendly sentiments towards his country.”

Witte's notions on all these subjects were a mixture of genuine wisdom and childish simplicity. His want of knowledge about some aspects of international law, custom, and political intercourse was amazing, as were also the serenity and dogmatism with which he would discourse upon these as though he were perfectly familiar with them.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE SECRET TREATY REVEALED

WITTE told me, as follows, the story of how he learned of the existence of the secret treaty and the means he devised for the purpose of invalidating it. "I did not know, neither did I suspect, that the two monarchs had been treaty-making during my sojourn at Portsmouth. It is true that the Kaiser had made an allusion to something they had done, but he did not give me to understand that it was an alliance or any compact of international moment. The exact words he employed as they now come back to me were these: 'I have a pleasant surprise for you. We—I mean your Tsar and I—have taken measures to realise this ideal of ours. If you are again put in charge of the government machine, are you prepared to lend us a helping hand towards making it a practical instrument of international politics?' 'Certainly, I am,' I replied. 'Good, very good,' he answered, 'I am delighted. You will see exactly what is required of you when you are in power again—when you get back to Petersburg—and then you will frame the measures you deem adequate. You know how high I rate your talents as a statesman.'

"That was all. I confess I never once thought of a secret treaty between the Tsar and the Kaiser, and still less of an alliance against France and England. I could not imagine such a thing.

"On my arrival in Russia, I received at Pskoff this telegram from the Tsar:

*"BJÖRKE, 15th September, 1905. Midnight.*

"TO SECRETARY OF STATE WITTE,—I wish you welcome on your home-coming from Washington<sup>1</sup> (*sic*) after having brilliantly carried out the mission of first-class State importance which I confided to you. I invite you to come to

<sup>1</sup> We visited Washington only for a few hours.



visit me here at Björke on the Yacht *Polar Star* on Friday. By my command the yacht *Arrow* will be sent and placed at your disposal.—NIKOLAI.’

“Before going to Björke, as I had to pass through Petersburg in any case, I made it my business to see Count Lamsdorff, as I did not know what might have happened while I was crossing the Atlantic. I am always in doubt as to what the Emperor may do when left to himself. It is his constant aspiration to be free to do as he pleases, and he hates being guided or counselled by those whose one function is to counsel him. So I saw the Minister of Foreign Affairs and had a long talk with him in the course of which we reviewed the recent past, domestic and foreign, surveyed the present, and glanced despondently at the future. I may tell you that I was full of the Morocco affair, highly pleased at the service I had rendered the French, and anxious that the best use should be made of the conditions I had thus helped to create.

“We also talked of Portsmouth, Roosevelt, the Kaiser, of the formidable difficulties that would face us when the troops came home, of the Duma scheme, and kindred matters. But Lamsdorff never breathed a word to me about a secret treaty. Thus initiated into current affairs I set out for Björkesund.

“The Tsar received me with that delightful affability of his which captivates not only all who meet him for the first time, but even many who, like myself, know the exact worth of his gestures and phrases. But when with me he can never entirely throw off a certain feeling of constraint which enwraps in an atmosphere of insincerity everything he says and does. After some desultory conversation which consisted on his part merely of disconnected questions and on mine of descriptions and comments, he casually turned the conversational stream on to Rominten. ‘And how did you find the Kaiser?’ I described Wilhelm’s charm of manner and how confused I should have felt if I had not attributed his exuberant cordiality to the circumstance that I repre-

sented the Tsar. 'Did he say anything to you about working for a stable peace in Europe?' 'Yes, sire. He never omits that topic from his conversations with me.' 'Did he ask you for your views about his scheme?' 'He knew what my views had been and he asked me whether they were the same. I said they were and he expressed his satisfaction.' 'I understand that you approve our having taken the matter up, he and I?' 'Yes, sire, fully. The aim appeals to me powerfully. I unfolded it myself to the Kaiser many years ago.' 'I am delighted. For it has long been my aim too, but there were always difficulties in the way. Happily we managed to make a good beginning and I am delighted that it has your approval. Did the Kaiser explain to you in what the measures consisted that he and I had taken?' 'No, sire, he merely mentioned the fact, intimating that on my arrival in Petersburg they would be communicated to me.' 'So you did not see the document?' 'None, sire.' 'Hm. You shall see it.'

"That was all.<sup>1</sup> The next day it was Lamsdorff's turn to go to Björkesund. The Tsar, as I afterwards learned, told him that he and I had exchanged views on the subject of the treaty—with which Lamsdorff himself was now acquainted—and that I had expressed my satisfaction with the aim and the means of attaining it. Lamsdorff, who, like a typical diplomatist, spoke without emotion or even accent, asked what I had said. You know Lamsdorff, and how calmly he takes things. He needed time to realise the statement that I approved a most momentous State document, which reversed the policy of the Empire and was drafted and signed by the Tsar without the knowledge of his Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and would bring Russia into universal odium. It was a repetition of the Kiao Chow business with this aggravating difference, that the issues were incomparably more far-reaching. And yet I had brandmarked the

<sup>1</sup> My historical sense obliges me to state that I possess several versions of this story narrated at various times between the years 1905-1914 by Witte himself, and that they are, as one would expect, divergent in secondary details. They all agree, however, in the essential point that Witte did not know of the treaty before September.

one and praised the other. But Lamsdorff, as you know, is a mild-mannered man who has his own theory of the rôle a minister should play in the autocracy. And his theory dovetails with the system—there is no doubt about that—but is incompatible with the spirit of the age and with the further life and prosperity of the Empire. So he once more gave gentle expression to his views on the subject, without a word or a tone indicative of undue emotion. He uttered his apprehension that the alliance concluded by the Tsar could not stand, because if it did the Franco-Russian alliance would be abrogated *ipso facto*. The Emperor made some feeble reply to screen the position which he really took up and which was that the treaty was signed, the alliance concluded, and that what he had done could not be undone now. Some other solution must therefore be thought out.

“Lamsdorff on his return from Björke saw me. I was never more surprised than by his manner towards me, his intimate friend. His coolness was deliberate and marked. He was as reserved as a diplomatic adversary and dry, almost cutting, in his talk. To begin with he addressed me by my brand new title of count. I felt nettled. I could not guess what had happened to bring about this change. But before I could articulate a question, he put one to me. ‘Is it a fact, count—I suppose it must be seeing that his Majesty affirms it—that you approve of the transaction he concluded with the Kaiser the other day at Björke?’ ‘Yes, so far as I know it. That has always been my policy—Europe must be united somehow or else it will go to pieces politically and socially. We must get rid of wars, at least on this continent, and not by unworthy mystifications like the Hague Conference, but by efficacious measures, otherwise the United States of America to-morrow, and perhaps Asiatic States the day after to-morrow, will beat Europe economically and therefore militarily as well. Once Russia, France, and Germany are united . . .’ Lamsdorff stopped me, repeating, ‘France? What are you talking about? Have we read the same treaty or different ones?’ I answered, ‘I have seen no treaty. I have only heard from each of the two Emperors

that they have taken a stride towards realising my conception of a feasible association of all European nations for the purposes of peaceful economic development and mutual protection.' 'Your conception? With France left out? Did you read the treaty?' 'No. What treaty?' 'Here, please read the treaty and see what it is that you applaud.' And removing the document from his drawer he handed it to me. I took out my spectacles and perused it. I felt a heaviness at the pit of my stomach. I could hardly realise what the words implied." Here Witte described the treaty to me, to the best of his recollection. It was not until later that I received a copy of it.<sup>1</sup> Then he went on:

"Now Lamsdorff and I were back on common ground. I was furious, and I showed it. Even he, although always collected and deliberate, displayed unmistakable symptoms of indignation. I said, 'That was a low trick for the Kaiser to play, and what are we to think of the destinies of an Empire which can be duped in that barefaced way and led to the brink of the abyss?' 'It is a very unfortunate affair,' Lamsdorff remarked. 'If I had known about it, I would have stopped it at the first inception. But everything was done without my knowledge.' 'Well, it must be undone now,' said I. 'It will lower us all in the eyes of France, for it is irreconcilable with our treaty obligations to the republic,' Lamsdorff went on. 'It is worse,' I added. 'It is a piece of base perfidy on Russia's part—for Russia is unfortunately compromised.' We then discussed the ways and means of upsetting the treaty. This was no easy matter because of the stand taken by the Tsar, who was prompted by the Kaiser. He maintained that what is done is done and cannot be recalled or abrogated; that the secret treaty did not run counter to the Franco-Russian covenants, unless these were offensive, and therefore pointed against Germany; and that France should be treated not so much in accordance with those covenants as congruously with her deserts, and that she had behaved abominably towards Russia and Germany. In this connection it is interesting to read a telegram from

<sup>1</sup> See p. 412.

his ever ready prompter who, having received a communication containing the Tsar's scruples or misgivings, wrote in a temper:

"The working of the treaty does not—as we agreed at Björke—collide with the Franco-Russian alliance—provided, of course, the latter is not aimed directly at my country. On the other hand the obligations of Russia towards France can only go so far as France merits that through her behaviour. Your ally has notoriously left you in the lurch during the whole war, whereas Germany helped you in every way as far as it could without infringing the laws of neutrality. That puts Russia morally also under obligations to us; *do ut des*. Meanwhile the indiscretions of Delcassé<sup>1</sup> have shown the world that though France is your ally she nevertheless made an agreement with England, and was on the very verge of surprising Germany with British help in the middle of peace, while I was doing my best to you and your country her ally. This is an experiment which she must not repeat again, and against a repetition of which I must expect you to guard me. I fully agree with you that it will cost time, labour, and patience to induce France to join us both, but the reasonable people will, in future, make themselves heard and felt! Our Morocco business is regulated to entire satisfaction, so that the air is free for better understanding between us. Our treaty is a very good base to build upon. We joined hands and signed before God who heard our vows.<sup>2</sup> I therefore think that the treaty can well come into existence.

"But if you wish any changes in the words or clauses or provisions for the future or different emergencies—as, for instance, the absolute refusal of France, which is improbable—I gladly await any proposals you will think fit to lay before me! Till these have been laid before me and agreed upon, the treaty must be adhered to by us as it is. The whole of

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the statements in the press that M. Delcassé when Minister of Foreign Affairs had obtained England's promise that she would land a contingent of troops on the Continent if Germany went to war against France.

<sup>2</sup> He would appear to have been deaf to the vows of France and Russia.

your influential press, *Nowosti*, *Nowoie Wremja*, *Russj*, etc., have, since a fortnight, become violently anti-Germans and pro-British. Partly they are bought by heavy sums of British money, no doubt. Still it makes my people very chary and does great harm to the relations newly growing between our countries. All these occurrences show that times are troubled, and that we must have clear courses to steer; the treaty we signed is a means of keeping straight without interfering with your alliance as such. What is signed is signed! and God is our testator! I shall await your proposals. Best love to Alex. Willy.’<sup>1</sup>

“It was a delicate and unenviable task to argue the matter with the Tsar on those lines. Lamsdorff was too milk-and-watery to succeed. He conceived his function to be that of a monitor, or say rather an oracle that uttered the forecast but took no thought of the action of those who demanded it. With me he was explicit enough. He said that the first clause obliged Russia to take up arms against her own ally France as well as against England in case of war between either of these countries and Germany. What a schoolboy ought to have perceived was that Russia would never be assailed by either France or England. That was as clear as the noonday sun. All that remained, therefore, of the eventualities, to provide for which the compact was struck up, was the case of hostilities breaking out between France or England and Germany. Consequently it was a one-sided bargain, of use only to the German Empire. It would bind Russia’s hands leaving those of Germany free. Then again it was a piece of revolting disloyalty to France, to whom we were pledged. How could we redeem the two pledges, stand by France against Germany and stand by Germany against France? The thing was preposterous. Yet there it was in black and white, the handiwork of the Kaiser whose respect for this piece of paper would have been touching were it not disgustingly hypocritical. To have induced the Tsar to put his name to this degrading deed was an insult to all Russia. I could hardly express myself within conventional limits.

<sup>1</sup> See Confidential Despatch, dated Glucksburg, 29th September.

The conversation between Lamsdorff and myself ended by our resolving to leave no stone unturned in order to invalidate or nullify the pact.

"Heaven only knows what we should have done if we had not been actively helped by the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevitch, who was easily convinced of the seriousness of the position and the necessity of clearing it up. It is my conviction that neither Lamsdorff nor myself would have succeeded in moving the Tsar had we not had the co-operation of the Grand Duke. For when pressed hard by our arguments the Emperor always managed to slip away on a side issue. For example, he said, 'The contingency which would, you say, oblige us to fight against France is so remote and improbable as not to come into consideration.' In truth he refused to be convinced or overruled. Now it was gall and wormwood to the Emperor to be obliged to acknowledge as true something which he had denied as false, or to accept as motive or aim what he had rejected as unreasonable or undesirable. On these points he was morbidly touchy. And in this case I could see that he was relying on his power as Emperor; *stet pro ratione voluntas*. That is where the co-operation of the Grand Duke came in so appositely.

"The most important exchange of views on the subject occurred a couple of days after the first conversation. The place was the Imperial Palace of Peterhof. Present were the Tsar, the Grand Duke Nicholas, Lamsdorff, and myself. Lamsdorff was sulky and at first silent, afterwards he spoke in his usual courtly way, wrapping up hard truths in soft phraseology. What he actually said was that if it pleased his Majesty the treaty would hold good. He was the sovereign and it was for him to decide. Certain formalities were all that need be observed. For instance, all pretext should be removed for saying that the treaty annuls the alliance with France and the accords underlying this. If the Emperor had had these accords under his eye at the time he would, of course, have avoided even appearances that might lend colour to such criticism. At present it was a task for the minister of Foreign Affairs, who would have to bring the two deeds

into harmony, and the way to effect this would be to obtain the assent of the French to the new arrangement.<sup>1</sup> One would have to reckon with unwillingness on the part of the French, but one could argue the matter, and if they were obdurate, Russia would at least be acting fairly and squarely.

"But it was I who did most of the talking, and I uttered what I thought and called things by their usual names. I said, 'It is open to your Majesty to do much that none of your subjects may attempt. You may even stop the hands of the clock of time for a brief while. You can denounce existing treaties. You can make alliances and unmake them. But there is one thing which even the Tsar of all the Russias may not do, and I may add would never wish to do, and that is to play your friends false. Your Majesty is incapable of an act of baseness. It is not in you to break a solemn promise which was binding on the entire Empire. Well, that is what the secret treaty makes you do. Of course, your Majesty was unaware of this. But none the less that document, if allowed to stand, would make you a party to a deed which no self-respecting individual anywhere could defend, much less approve. It would discredit Russia in the eyes of the world. And for that reason it cannot be upheld. It is impossible for your Majesty sincerely to promise to defend France against Germany and at the same time sincerely to promise to defend Germany against France.' The Tsar, who had already said in reply to Lamsdorff that he would never consent to have the French government consulted on the subject, was obviously angry with me, but did not reply. The Grand Duke, however, spoke up and said he endorsed Lamsdorff's judgment and mine. But he proposed—I am not sure whether it was he or Lamsdorff—that instead of communicating with the French cabinet it might be well to try whether sufficient pressure could be brought to bear on the

<sup>1</sup> It has been affirmed that the Russian ambassador in Paris, Nelidoff, too, was sounded on this subject and had banished any hope that the Tsar or the Kaiser might have cherished. This was wholly superfluous. Rouvier, who was perhaps the most venturesome minister of the republic at that time and had joined hands with Delcassé's Teuton adversaries, had, as we saw, declared that he had rather keep out of a triple alliance of Germany, France, and Russia.



German Foreign Office to get the deed annulled. Anyhow I know that it was the Grand Duke who helped us materially, and practically at last broke the Tsar's resolve to maintain the treaty in vigour. When we left the Peterhof Palace the only problem that faced us was one of ways and means. But even that was puzzling.

"The next move was made by Lamsdorff who had representations made to the German Foreign Office to the effect that the accord having been arranged in the absence of the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, and at a moment when the Tsar had not access to the documents defining the obligations of the Empire towards the other powers affected, it lacked some of the essential elements that impart to such treaties their binding force, and that the Russian minister having now taken cognisance of the document and reported to the Tsar has been commanded by him to adopt the needful steps to have the treaty annulled. Would the German Foreign Office take cognisance of this?

"The reply that came from Berlin was characteristic. The conclusion was the same as that of the last telegram of the Kaiser to the Tsar. The document in question, it was argued, had been duly signed by the Emperors. It was they who had negotiated it. Therefore any question respecting it was a matter which they must themselves discuss and settle. Their respective Foreign Secretaries were incompetent to deal with it. This uncompromising attitude rendered it incumbent on Lamsdorff and myself to think of the alternative and arrange to have the facts disclosed to the French government. But we were alarmed at the consequences. France would not look upon the act of treason—for it was nothing less—with indifference and indulgence, and Russia's moral credit would vanish. We were at our wits' end when a chance word suggested a key to the solution. I was saying to Lamsdorff, 'It is all the more disgusting on the part of the Kaiser that it was he who pushed Russia into the war with Japan, and now it is he who is preventing us from establishing peace in Europe.' Those words reminded Lamsdorff of the third clause of the

secret treaty and suggested to him the idea of making that the lever of our action. It runs: 'The present treaty receives binding force at the moment of the conclusion of peace between Russia and Japan.' Lamsdorff had it pointed out to the German Foreign Office that if they persisted in their uncompromising attitude and declined to agree to the abrogating of the secret treaty, Russia, in order to escape its provisions, would feel bound to postpone the conclusion of peace with Japan and would decline responsibility for the consequences.

"Then, and only then, did the answer come acquiescing in Lamsdorff's request to annul the secret treaty. It came dished up after the manner of diplomatic notes, and set forth that the Tsar had no access at the time when he signed the treaty to the requisite documents, and therefore was not aware that the terms of the compact ran counter to those of the Franco-Russian Alliance.

"I want to draw your attention to one interesting point in this discussion: Lamsdorff's request to the German Foreign Office was not for the annulation pure and simple of the treaty. Convinced by me long before that a European association, call it as you like, would form the most stable basis for the peace of Europe, he favoured my scheme which would have embodied this conception. What he demurred to was the form given to it by the Kaiser—a form which left France out and impregnated Russia's relations towards her with a deadly hostile spirit. In his demand, Lamsdorff asked that the pristine idea be kept in view and proposals be made for embodying it in a treaty which would be free from the objections that proved fatal to this one. France must be consulted from the outset of the negotiations. But to this proposal the Berlin Foreign Office returned no reply.

"This victory of ours over Wilhelm II. brought down upon us his fierce hate. Nothing was left undone to oust Lamsdorff from the Foreign Office. The Kaiser represented him as the *ame damnée* of Witte. At Copenhagen Izvolsky had caught the Kaiser's eye and found favour in his sight. The long talk they had had there about the attitude

of the Danes towards an eventual violation of that country's neutrality in case of war had impressed him favourably, and he was very desirous of having Izvolsky sent as ambassador to Berlin to represent the Tsar, just as he was also very desirous of having Sir Arthur Nicolson appointed ambassador to represent Great Britain in Berlin.

"From his correspondence with Nicholas II. the Kaiser learned the part that I had played in getting the secret treaty annulled. But he made one mistake: he attributed my action to my partiality for England. He thought that you had converted me into a champion of Britain. I learned this from Mendelssohn who visited me here<sup>1</sup> and told me so. Mendelssohn added that he had done what was possible to set the Emperor right and to make it clear to him that my attitude was free from duplicity, that I am not for an alliance or entente with England, and that I am not an enemy to Germany. But notwithstanding Mendelssohn's defence, the Kaiser's dislike persisted and he intrigued with your friend Schwanebach against me. You know how and with what results.

"When I was floating the biggest loan on record in April of the ensuing year, at the most critical moment, the Kaiser induced Mendelssohn to withdraw so that the success of the operation was temporarily imperilled. You were with me at the time and you remember how keenly I felt the blow, which I traced unhesitatingly to the man who had dealt it.

"As you are aware I had to quit office as soon as the loan was floated. But even without Wilhelm's intrigues I should have retired. Lamsdorff, my friend, wanted to leave too on principle, and he actually wrote a petition asking the Emperor's permission to resign. I besought him not to send it. He complied with my request, and now note the cunning of Nicholas II., who was anxious that he should tender his resignation. When I was bidding good-bye to the Tsar and receiving his thanks for the loan he suddenly turned to me and said in his sweetest tones, 'Tell me, count, will you grant me another favour?' 'Most certainly, your Majesty.

<sup>1</sup> At Biarritz.

You have only to command.' 'Will you serve me as ambassador?' 'With the utmost pleasure, sire, but I should not like to have to travel very far from Russia.' 'Oh, it won't be far. You will be accredited to a great power in Europe. But tell me, will you object to go on the score that your chief, the Foreign Secretary, is a younger man than yourself?' 'No, sire, not at all. Besides, Count Lamsdorff is not so much younger than I am.' 'Oh, I don't mean Count Lamsdorff, but another and a younger man.' I took the hint, went at once to Lamsdorff and reported the conversation to him, for I well knew that it had been arranged for that very purpose. And the whole transaction was devised by the Kaiser who wanted Izvolsky at the Foreign Office. I then told Lamsdorff to send in his resignation, which he did.

"In the meanwhile I made inquiries as to what had gone before the actual drafting and signing of the document. I like to have a clear and complete picture of such historic events in my mind's eye. I talked to several persons who, I thought, might throw some light on the subject, and gradually I pieced their accounts together and reconstituted the scene. What I suspected was confirmed: that there had been a long correspondence by messengers and by telegraph between the two monarchs, and that their meeting had been settled in that way with the utmost secrecy. Nobody was told of it, not even I who had seen and talked at considerable length with the Tsar before my departure for America, and who ought to have been primed with information about such matters. He never breathed a word of what he was meditating.

"When the two monarchs met and decided to sign the treaty the Kaiser desired to have it countersigned. The Tsar who wanted to crown his secret negotiations in a conspirative way did not see the object of this caution and said so. But Wilhelm with his business instincts insisted—'for the sake of the form,' he pleaded. Nicholas II. was put out by this because he disliked confiding State affairs of this nature to any one. He is possessed by a mania for secrecy. But he allowed himself to be overruled by his confederate.

Then he called up Admiral Birileff and spoke to him on the subject. These and other details I hold from Birileff himself. And when I upbraided him with having been a party to an unqualified and unpatriotic act, he defended himself saying that if I had been in his place I would have done the same thing, and that he himself would do it again under like conditions. 'Could I,' he asked, 'refuse the Emperor who, looking embarrassed and dejected, made a touching appeal to my loyalty and devotion and asked me to help him out of a difficulty?' Birileff gave me his word of honour that he never read nor saw a line of the document he was signing, and that he did not know it was a treaty with Germany, although if he had known it he would have signed it all the same. The Tsar had begun by asking him, 'Do you trust me?' and he answered, 'Absolutely.' 'If I were to ask you to sign a document without reading it, or with your eyes closed, would you do it?' 'Unhesitatingly, sire.' 'I knew you would. Well now, look. Here is a paper which I want you to sign in that way.' 'And the Emperor left uncovered only the space where I was to write my name. I at once took the pen and affixed my signature.' "

Witte never wholly relinquished his ideal of a federation or sodality of European States, nor the hope that through his agency and that of a few kindred spirits throughout the world it might be brought perceptibly nearer to its high consummation. The present ordering of human society with its huge frauds, its vileness and pettiness, and the incalculable sufferings thus wantonly inflicted upon mortals who might be rendered content, kindled his indignation and a degree of energy for which there was no scope. He often longed for the post of ambassador in Paris and, as already stated, the hope was fed by the Tsar—for a strange personal purpose while Witte's object was to work for the achievement of his cherished aim. The unbroken sequence of successes that had crowned his efforts in every department of public life to which he set his hand encouraged him to think that with him opportunity would always be attended by success. Once installed in the Paris Embassy he would

be able to inaugurate the grandiose work of European reconstruction. The Tsar on his side was equally resolute, not only to take into his own hands the direction of the important public affairs which interested him, but to do this as often as possible surreptitiously. Conspirative bargaining and clandestine machinations which clashed with the official obligations of his government had a fascination for him which he could with difficulty resist.

Nicholas II. had occasionally sought to win over his Foreign Secretaries to his own petty political patchwork, but since Lamsdorff's dismissal he had met with no success. During the negotiations for the convention with Great Britain, for example—a convention conceived on generous lines as a wiping out of all old scores with a view to a settled friendship—he would insist on giving Russia a frontier bordering on Afghanistan. This idea had been engrafted on his mind by the Kaiser in conversation and in letters. Evidences of the insidious untruths by which it was fed are found in the Willy-Nicky telegrams.<sup>1</sup> It was exceedingly difficult for M. Izvolsky to hold his own against the pressure put on him by the Emperor in this direction. But the minister refused to budge and the monarch ended by allowing him and the British government to have their way.

In the year 1910, when visiting the German Kaiser at Potsdam, Nicholas II. found another opportunity for modifying international politics off his own bat, and he utilised it to the full. In spite of the circumstance that he was accompanied by his Minister for Foreign Affairs,<sup>2</sup> while the Kaiser was surrounded with advisers like Bethmann-Hollweg and Kiderlen-Wachter, Wilhelm II. contrived to have a quiet after-dinner talk with his guest out of the hearing of any third person. And he made the most of it. In essentials the official agreement which the two governments signed<sup>3</sup> was the same that M. Izvolsky had found it necessary to draft after the convention with Britain, because the

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> M. Sazonoff.

<sup>3</sup> Agreement of the 19th August, 1911.

German government refused to be bound by that convention. But there was a difference.

The Kaiser's ministers had long been asking Russia to undertake to connect Persia from Khanekin with the Baghdad railway by a branch line, but M. Izvolsky, when he was Foreign Secretary, and M. Sazonoff who succeeded him, refused. Their tactics were to wait until something happened to enable them to get Germany to withdraw her claim or to accept compensation elsewhere. But this plan was upset by the Tsar who, unknown to his minister, acquiesced in the Kaiser's demand.

On this same occasion, and it may well be during the same confidential "exchange of ideas," a more fateful covenant would appear, from accounts published<sup>1</sup> since the Tsar's abdication, to have been agreed to by the imperial host and guest, the upshot of which was to authorise Germany to send General Liman von Sanders to Constantinople at the head of a military mission. This was one of the Kaiser's moves preliminary to the European war, and the Russian Premier construed it as such.

On this occasion the Kaiser's method of approaching the Tsar was in the style of his opening to the conversation which had culminated years before in the accord about Kiao Chow. He stated that he had been requested by the Porte to lend an army instructor to Turkey, and that he proposed sending General Liman von Sanders to discharge the functions if the Tsar had nothing to urge against that. And Nicholas II., proud to be asked to decide such questions which hardly concerned him, answered that he saw no reason why he should demur. Thereupon the Kaiser, mindful of former experiences, expressed a wish to have this assent in black and white, and a document embodying it was duly signed.

The Russian ministers had no inkling of what their imperial master had done. He seems to have informed none of them. Both the Premier and the Minister of Foreign Affairs were justly alarmed when they learned that Germany

<sup>1</sup> By the influential and widely circulated Moscow journal, *Russkoye Slovo*.

had sent a military mission to Turkey under General Liman von Sanders, who had become commander of the Constantinople army corps, and therefore the Kaiser's military lieutenant in Turkey. They did the little that seemed feasible at the moment in order to have the appointment cancelled, but in vain. Among other steps they requested me to advocate publicly and privately the recall of the naval instructor sent to Turkey by the British government in the hope that the Kaiser would follow suit and withdraw Liman von Sanders. As I had strong reasons for not sharing this hope, I declined to comply with the request. After the lapse of some time, the Russian Premier<sup>1</sup> when passing through Berlin was asked by the Kaiser why they had made such a fuss in Petersburg about the German military mission under von Sanders, and to the Russian's amazement he invoked the Tsar's written assent. Seeing how surprised the Premier looked, Wilhelm II. showed him the document. The resourceful Russian having read it said, "Yes, but the Tsar's acquiescence had for its object only the appointment of General von Sanders as military instructor, not as commander of Turkish army corps." "But that is only a mere bagatelle," retorted the Kaiser. "Why so much ado about that?"

On his return to Petersburg the Premier informed the Minister of Foreign Affairs of what he had seen and heard in the German capital, and learned that this official had no cognisance of the document nor of the accord it registered. After that M. Kokofftseff wrote a report on the episode to the Tsar and mentioned the constructions he had improvised and put upon it. And Nicholas II., seemingly unconscious of the incongruity of his own conduct, annotated the passage containing his minister's interpretation thus: "I think so, too!"

<sup>1</sup> Kokofftseff.



## CHAPTER XIX

### THE DOWNFALL OF THE TSARDOM

TSARISM, its own stock of vitality exhausted and with no outer sources to draw upon, languished and decayed rapidly. Time and its changes acted on the predatory State as potent solvents. Every stage in the forward progress of Europe was a new set-back or a fresh danger to the system. The growth of manufactures in neighbouring countries; the incipient industrialisation of Russia; the general rise in the standard of living; the spread of technical instruction; the improvement in educational methods and the corresponding sharpening of commercial and industrial competition; the advance of social and political sciences; the softening of manners; the increase of tolerance; the corresponding religious movements in Russia; and that invisible undercurrent without a name, which is so often alluded to as the spirit of the age, all tended to isolate the Tsarist State, render it obnoxious to the European community, and accentuate the centrifugal tendencies of its component parts. The work of governing the 180,000,000 became more and more difficult, seeing that whatever orientation a minister or a cabinet might now give to his policy, the general result was invariably negative.

If, for instance, a man took office who, like Pobiedonostseff, made a vigorous effort to surround the country with a Chinese wall in order to keep out the destructive tendencies of the west, he was vehemently decried not only by the press and the intelligentsia at home, but by all liberal and radical Europe<sup>1</sup> as well. If a narrow-minded bureaucrat like Count Dmitry Tolstoy strove to hinder the Jews from spreading cosmopolitanism and religious indifferentism among a people whose meagre sociability and slight traces of civic virtue

<sup>1</sup> I, who was one of Pobiedonostseff's unsparing critics, recognised the man's honesty and the rigorous logic with which he conceived his aspect of the problem.

were derived from ancient custom and Christianity, he and his government were furiously attacked and discredited throughout the world. When Alexander III. suddenly curtailed certain religious privileges of the Baltic barons, the champions of advanced thought in Germany and also in England lifted up their voices against the Tsardom and all its works.<sup>1</sup> If on the other hand the sails of the State-ship began to be filled by a liberal wind, as when Prince Sviatopolk Mirsky or Witte was the principal representative of the Tsar, the Jews, the Baltic Germans, the Poles, the Lithuanians, the Esthonians, the Letts, the Mohammedans, the Armenians, the Georgians, all, forthwith, raised their hands and started off in the direction of their several eclectic affinities, but invariably away from Tsarism, until the enterprising minister put on the brake. If a spell of religious tolerance meant a further weakening of the autocrat's hold on the people, a spurt of persecution had a like effect. In a word, the rhythms of the multitudinous elements composing the Tsardom had become so jarring that there was no more hope of harmonising them.

Nor was it only the diverse races, but also the social classes of one and the same race, whose fixed tendencies were opposed to those of the political system. Thus turning from the nationalities to the bulk of the Russian people—the agricultural population—one was struck with the circumstance that it was mediæval in its institutions, Asiatic in its strivings, and prehistoric in its conceptions of life. The peasants believed that the Japanese had won the Manchurian campaign by assuming the form of microbes, getting into the boots of the Russian soldiers, biting their legs, and bringing about their death. When there was an epidemic in a district they often killed the doctors “for poisoning the wells and spreading the disease.” They still burn witches with delight, disinter the dead to lay a ghost, strip unfaithful

<sup>1</sup>I was myself one of those who exposed the crying injustice of this coercive measure which compelled a man like Prince Barclay de Tolly to have his children brought up in the Orthodox Russian Church, to which he did not belong, because his wife was a member of it.

wives stark naked, tie them to carts, and whip them through the village. It is fair, therefore, to say that the level of culture of the peasantry, in whose name Russia is now being ruined, is considerably lower than that of Western Europe. And when the only restraints that keep such a multitude in order are suddenly removed the consequences to the community are bound to be catastrophic. The peasantry, like the intelligentsia, is wanting in the social sense that endows a race with cohesiveness, solidity, and political unity. Between the people and anarchism for generations there stood but the frail partition formed by its primitive ideas of God and the Tsar, and since the Manchurian campaign these were rapidly melting away.

Wholly indifferent to politics, of which they understood nothing, but cunning withal and land greedy, the peasants were only a long row of ciphers to which the articulate class, mainly officialdom, lent significance. All that they wanted was land, how it was obtained being a matter of no moment to them. Their view of property was that their own possessions were inviolable, whereas those of the actual owners should be wrested from them without more ado. This simplicist socialism was the crystallisation of ages of ignorance, thralldom, and misguidance. It was manifest that the complete enfranchisement of these elements would necessarily entail the dissolution of the Tsardom.

This situation and what it portended were plain to me at the time, and I strove perseveringly and unavailingly to make them equally clear to the nations and governments interested in Russia's well-being. My oft-repeated estimate of the forces that were making for the speedy disruption of the Tsardom has been borne out by events which are even now modifying the course of the world's history. Eleven years ago I wrote: "The agrarian question in Russia is the alpha and omega of the revolution. It furnishes the lever by means of which the ancient regime, despite the support of the army, may be heaved into the limbo of things that were and are not. So important is the land problem that if it could be definitely suppressed or satisfactorily solved the

revolution would be a tame affair indeed, hardly as exciting as was that of one of the petty German States in the last century. In this case it still might be possible to a clever statesman, after and despite all that has taken place in Russia since October last,<sup>1</sup> to prop up the bureaucratic system and renew its lease of life for another generation. For it must not be forgotten that fully 80 per cent. of the population are illiterate, and that millions of them are plunged in such benighted ignorance and crass superstition as foreigners can hardly conceive of. Hence they sorely need guidance. . . .<sup>2</sup> The cry, 'the land for the peasants,' intoxicates, nay, maddens them. They are then ready to commit any crime against property and life in the hope of realising their object. The explosive force that may be thus called into being and utilised for the purpose of overthrowing the present social and political order is enormous. *The formidable army of the Tsar dwindles into nothing when compared to it, because itself is the source of the army to which it imparts its own strivings and tendencies.*"<sup>3</sup>

The intelligentsia, whose ideas about human society were streaked with opinions borrowed from various countries and left unharmonised, partook of the characteristic traits both of the people and of the progressive nationalities. Composed chiefly of theory-mongers who had no roots in the country and who carried on a continuous anti-monarchist and communistic or nihilist propaganda in schools and elsewhere, it was perhaps the most corrosive solvent of all.

To my thinking, then, there was no sovereign remedy for the malady from which the Tsardom was suffering. It was mortal, and the utmost that could be aimed at was to postpone its effects for a few years. And even this would require higher statesmanship than the Emperor was employing. Already in February, 1905, I wrote of the incipient revolution: "What the least observant can hardly fail to note is that there is no longer a head shaping and directing the course of events in the Tsardom. Certain forces are felt, certain things happen, the entire people drifts. Old and new

<sup>1</sup>1905.    <sup>2</sup>*Contemporary Review*, August, 1906, p. 283.    <sup>3</sup>*Ibidem*.

ministers resign, governors-general imperceptibly recede from their posts, scientific institutions, learned professions, local councils, members of the nobility, individuals and guilds of the merchant class, the peasant masses, band themselves together to struggle against the autocracy, which, Archimedes-like, is solicitous only for its circles. For Russia such an unwonted condition of things is truly revolutionary and chaotic.”<sup>1</sup> And surveying the revolutionary ferment with an eye to its probable duration I gave it as my opinion that “it cannot by its nature be short: but, protean in its shapes and clumsy in its methods, *may last throughout the century.*”<sup>2</sup>

But that the autocracy was doomed and would not survive Nicholas II., I felt as certain as one can be of any future event dependent upon a variety of factors with most of which one is conversant. As far back as May, 1905, I wrote of Nicholas II. as the last of the Tsars and added: “Autocracy has heated its palace with sparks, and must now do penance in the ashes.”<sup>3</sup>

But Count Witte looked more hopefully on the situation as beseems a man of action wont to wield power, to seize opportunity, and successfully to modify circumstance. He long clung to the belief that under certain conditions, more and more difficult to realise, the problem might yet be solved of welding into one the disparate elements of the Tsardom and modernising the mediæval State by a home and foreign policy of his own devising. His plan was to create common economic interests which would absorb most of the activity, co-ordinate the efforts, and knit together the various races and classes of the population. The differences among these he would have lessened by rendering accessible to all who were ambitious or gifted commercial and industrial training in schools and technological institutes.<sup>4</sup> Parallel with this he would have fostered the inchoate native industries by establishing profitable markets for their output in

<sup>1</sup> *Contemporary Review*, February, 1905, p. 285.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 284.

<sup>3</sup> *National Review*, May, 1905, p. 446.

<sup>4</sup> While Finance Minister he accomplished much in this line.

the Far East. And by way of rendering these endeavours continuous and fruitful, it was his determination to keep Russia out of war—which he always felt would be her undoing—by entering into a continental league which would settle the affairs of the world, not indeed without a backing of military force, but without actually employing it.

But the people whose vital interest it was that Witte's or some similar scheme should be worked out to a successful issue, the Tsar, the dynasty, the Jews, the Liberals, and the entire intelligentsia, turned against him with rare unanimity and persistence and thwarted his every project. After 1906, he had frequent visions of the disastrous convulsions in which the Tsardom would expire.

Long before that he had foretold the anarchist revolution which would, he feared, change not only the regime but the face of Russia. I have a lively recollection of one prophecy of his made to me in the United States shortly after the accord with the Japanese, when in one of his moods of exaltation he said: "When I am at home and watch the flow of political and social events my attention is almost wholly taken up by their bearings on each other and by their nexus with foregoing occurrences, whereas the stream of general tendency which they also reveal often escapes me. But looking back now and from this distance at things Russian, I seem to discern that current more plainly because I can see the whole community as distinguished from groups and coteries and classes and nationalities. Well, let me tell you what strikes me: It is the slow but steady advance of Russia towards a politico-social ordering very different from any evolutionary stage of the present regime, possibly approaching that of America. Are you surprised? Under certain unrealised conditions it might be a blessing. It is largely a question of education and training, but also, to some extent, of inborn capacity.

"The people of the United States have strengthened my faith in the future of humanity. Their generosity makes me feel that my idea of the reconstruction of Europe will develop, no doubt in other hands than mine, into a project for the

reconstruction of the world. From the narrow political angle of vision, the United States government had much to gain by letting us go on fighting Japan to a finish. Both belligerents would have been enormously weakened and America might then have had the satisfaction of settling the problems of the Pacific in her own fashion. That was the selfish, the European way of treating the matter. But instead of that, President Roosevelt and the entire people generously put forth their whole-hearted efforts to get both war-waging peoples to lay down their arms and negotiate peace. That altruism is worthy of the new era which it foreshadows. I shall never forget this noble deed. Leagued with a few such peoples we could safeguard the peace of the world. But at present that is only a pious desire . . . and besides, the Americans have no end of grievances against us.

"I am now going back home bound by promises to Jews and Christians here to do my best to modify the repressive legislation that keeps the people of Russia further apart from that of the United States than does the ocean. . . . How shall I redeem them? You know what it means. The Americans do not. To abolish even the Jewish Pale of Settlement is but a fraction of what is expected of me. Yet that alone would involve a profound modification of the autocracy as at present established. Here in the bracing atmosphere of the great republic such a feat may seem insignificant. But on the other side of Eydtkuhnen <sup>1</sup> it is high treason to think of it. But I will do my best. . . ." He did. But he was alone, and as the Russians put it, "one man in the field is not a soldier."

That is why I wrote a few months later: "Witte's views are immaterial to the issue, for if he were as Liberal as Abraham Lincoln, he would still be almost as powerless as a Sioux chief, unless he had a strong Liberal following and that was denied him chiefly by the Jews." <sup>2</sup> He had no following because of the anarchist or unsocial leanings of the

<sup>1</sup> The German frontier station on the journey to St. Petersburg.

<sup>2</sup> *North American Review*, February, 1906, p. 469.

population. "It is clear," I wrote, "that the Slav nation lacks political education and self-control; has no idea of tactics, no habit of discipline, hardly yet a standard by which to separate the secondary from the essential, the final goal from those intermediate aims which differ little from the means. The elements of the population that display an interest in public affairs are animated by a spirit of insubordination which makes it hard for them to combine. They are atoms which would seem to repel rather than attract each other, so that in lieu of a few strong parties a large number of little groups are likely to be formed. Moreover they are more deeply moved by purely personal considerations than by patriotism, discerning friends and enemies where we should expect them to see only Russia and her destinies."

The abortive rising of 1905-6, which I watched at close quarters, convinced me that any democratic revolution, however peacefully effected, would throw open the gates wide to the forces of anarchism and break up the Empire. And a glance at the mere mechanical juxtaposition—it could not be called union—of elements so conflicting among themselves as were the ethnic, social, and religious sections and divisions of the Tsar's subjects would have brought home this obvious truth to the mind of any unbiassed and observant student of politics. The mad spectacle which was unfolded to my gaze by that revolt revealed the further fact that the army, the workmen, and the peasantry were much more likely to fraternise with each other and pull down the pillars of the social fabric than seemed possible to the ministers of the crown. Nay, the bureaucrats themselves appeared to me capable of throwing over the Tsar on the spur of the moment and proclaiming their faith in republicanism or in any other regime that might take the people's fancy. For nothing was impossible to their curious psychology. I had had amazing examples of these sudden conversions before my eyes when I wrote: "The capers cut by the officials were specially amusing. Prematurely giving up the autocracy as lost, large numbers of them made hot-haste to turn from what they deemed the setting to the rising sun. They



announced that they had always been democrats at heart, had always known that the regime was rotten and would fall to pieces. The autocracy, on which they had lived and still were living, they proceeded to scourge with tongues that stung like scorpions until there was not a sound place left in it. 'A man's foes shall be those of his own household.'"<sup>1</sup>

Witte, had he had a free hand, the confidence of the Emperor, and an adequate following from the year 1905 until his death, might at the utmost have prolonged for a little the life of the Tsardom while gradually limiting the power of the Tsar. By the time of Stolypin's violent death things had come to such a pass that there was no longer hope for either.

In lieu of Witte's statesmanlike plan, we find a foreign policy which was deeply marked by systematic disloyalty to the principal powers with which the Tsardom had friendly or neighbourly intercourse and a system of home government destructive of the basis of all morality. Towards Britain the duplicity of the Tsardom, several instances of which I have already mentioned,<sup>2</sup> was continued down to the moment when M. Izvolsky exchanged views with King Edward about the Entente scheme which Poklevsky had first submitted to Witte. And then the duplicity ceased, but only in so far as the foreign policy was conducted by the Tsar's ministers; it remained as trothless as before when directed by the Tsar himself. It is noteworthy that even towards Germany, who enjoyed the "traditional friendship of the Tsardom," a tendency to sharp practice now and again startled the politicians of Berlin, as, for instance, during the negotiations about German participation in the Russo-Chinese bank. So untrustworthy was Nicholas II. in all his dealings that it is doubtful whether he could always be true to his own self. Towards China, the Tsardom and its servants deemed every form of wile and treachery

<sup>1</sup> *North American Review*, February, 1906, p. 462.

<sup>2</sup> The Persian loan episode, the seizure of Port Arthur, the secret letter to the Emir of Afghanistan, and the readiness to combine with Germany against us during the Boer war are instances.

permissible. The giving away by Nicholas II. of a Chinese port to the Kaiser; the seizure of another port by the Tsar himself, who a short time before had received the use of Chinese territory for his railway; the infamous plot to kidnap the Emperor and the Empress of China while bound to them by ties of intimate friendship, will rank in political history with the most iniquitous doings of Frederic the Great. But whereas the Prussian king's obliquity was invariably a means, and generally an efficacious means, to an intelligible and patriotic end, the perfidies of the Tsardom served merely as the measure of its own depravity, pettiness, and impotence. The reader will not be surprised to learn that history is unable to acquit the Tsarist State of what may fairly be termed sharp practice towards Austria-Hungary in the matter of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Whithersoever we turn our eyes we are confronted with the same combination of cunning and deception. While professing most friendly feelings and cultivating cordial relations with Turkey, the Tsar, together with Nelidoff and Tshikhatshoff, planned a treacherous attack on the shores of the Upper Bosphorus which was with difficulty thwarted by Witte. While "practising" an intimate alliance with France, Russia in the person of her Tsar concluded a secret alliance with France's covert enemy, Germany, thus undertaking to fight on the side of each against the other. While the negotiations between the Kaiser and Tsar were going on with a view to this accord I wrote: "France's position is unique. . . . As a nation she is mistrusted for sowing revolutionary ideas broadcast, but tolerated as the keeper of the money bags. As a power she is regarded as a *quantité négligeable* and is slighted accordingly. Her milliards are so many hostages which she has given to Russia for her good behaviour. Autocracy possessed of the calf takes no further thought of the cow which, however plaintively it may low, is certain not to stray too far away."

In 1910 the Tsar at Potsdam struck up another compact with Wilhelm II. according to which neither of them was to become a member of any combination of powers formed

against the other. In that same year most of the Russian troops quartered in Warsaw, Brest-Litovsk, Grodno, which would, in case of war, have endangered Germany's mobilisation, were withdrawn. Lastly, when the Germans in their turn were arranging to take possession of Constantinople, by the despatch of General Liman von Sanders and his military mission, the Tsar and the Kaiser came to a secret agreement approving it. But again the Russian ministers were kept in the dark about it by Nicholas II.

"The most painful impression of all," Entente publicists tell us, was made by the perfidious conduct of Nicholas II. in arranging for a separate peace in the year 1916-17 when his devoted allies were shedding their blood and giving their substance ungrudgingly in his cause. I cannot agree with them. I have made inquiries into this allegation and, although it is uncommonly difficult to prove a negative assertion, the upshot of my investigation comes as near to it as one can reasonably demand. So far as I have been able to ascertain there is not a tittle of evidence to show that Nicholas II. had the intention to make a separate peace. That conditions being what they were his armies could not, with the best will in the world, have continued to fight much longer on the same scale as theretofore may be taken for granted. But it nowise follows that he would have concluded a separate peace. And from what I know of his mentality, of the motives to which he was most impressible, and of the available evidence, I look upon that assumption as most improbable.<sup>1</sup> The fact is that Nicholas II. was waging war on two fronts, one against our common enemies and the other against revolutionary bolshevism in Russia, and this indictment is probably part of the tactics of the bolshevist offensive which had the support of the English and the French. I venture to go further and to assert that from the point of view of the Allies the safest policy consisted in keeping Nicholas II. on the throne while giving him a cabinet

<sup>1</sup> Certain ignoble charges launched against the Tsaritsa, whose meddling in politics was disastrous to the Tsardom, are equally groundless and even more characteristic of those who first launched them.

of ministers responsible to the Duma. And Great Britain and France, had each had a supple statesman at their head, could have accomplished the two-fold task with an intelligent effort.

The extinction of this gross, widespread, and *a priori* credible accusation leaves the unflattering portrait which I drew of the Tsar in the year 1904 with all its traits intact: the cunning, the love of secrecy, the self-worship, the pettiness, the instability, and the deficiency of moral sense. To end the feeble, shifty, extravagant dynasty of the Holstein-Gottorps, Fate would appear to have selected its most typical representative.

If the intercourse of the Tsarist State with other nations was characterised by systematic bad faith, its dealings with its own subjects were, as I have shown, destructive of all morality. By the year 1906 it had fallen so low that systematic recourse to crime of a peculiarly dastardly kind had become its mainstay. Conspiracies against the government, against State dignitaries, and even against princes of the reigning house were deliberately hatched by State servants in order to supply them with a pretext for shooting, hanging, or imprisoning men who only asked for a regime like that which existed in Austria or Prussia. And in order to enable the double-dyed miscreants who thus entrapped their unsuspecting fellows to continue their work of treachery, the State connived at the execution of several of those abominable plots against such pillars of the Tsardom as Von Plehve, the Grand Duke Sergius, General von Launitz, and Stolypin.

Although it was known to the government that their agent Azeff had had these and other zealous champions of autocracy done to death in order to maintain his credit with the terrorists, he was still retained in the service of the Tsar. And while monarchists were thus slaying monarchists for the good of Tsarism, Kazantseff and his group of reactionaries were inveigling ignorant revolutionists into assassinating eminent liberal reformers, assuring them that they were executing spies. Life in the Tsardom could not be contemplated as other than the abomination of desolation.

The main object of these diabolic methods was to perpetuate a system which for iniquity had no parallel in Christendom, and to keep 140,000,000 peasants in a plight which makes one wonder as much at their pre-revolutionary patience as one has wondered since at their anarchist frenzy. I once sketched the state of things roughly as follows: "Too often the Russian peasant dwells in a hovel more filthy than a sty, more noxious than a phosphoric match factory. He goes to bed at six and even five o'clock in the winter, because he cannot afford money to buy petroleum enough for artificial light. He has no meat, no eggs, no butter, no milk, often no cabbage, and lives mainly on black bread and potatoes. Lives? He starves on an insufficient quantity of them. At this moment there are numerous peasants in Bessarabia who for lack of that staple food are dying of hunger. At this moment in White Russia, after the departure of the reserves for the seat of war, there are many households in which not even a pound of rye corn is left for the support of the families who have lost their breadwinners. And yet those starving men, women, and children had raised plenty of corn to live upon—for the Russian tiller of the soil eats chiefly black bread, and is glad when he has enough of that. But they were forced to sell it immediately after the harvest in order to pay the taxes. And they sold it for nominal prices—so cheap that the foreigners could resell it to them cheaper than Russian corn merchants!"<sup>1</sup> Such was the material plight of a large section of the Tsar's subjects.

As for the fog that enwrapped the souls of millions of these famished human beings, its denseness may be imagined when I say that many of them had no standard of right and wrong. Imagine the mental state of the followers of Father John of Cronstadt, who, in a village<sup>2</sup> worshipping my late acquaintance as an incarnation of the Supreme Being, sacrificed a woman in his honour—a woman aged forty-one, the mother of a family of five! They declared, when questioned,

<sup>1</sup> *Contemporary Review*, March, 1905, p. 313.

<sup>2</sup> The village of Upper Yelshanka.

that this was an offering all the more acceptable to the Almighty that the victim herself was eager thus to suffer death for her faith. And so pleased were these pious people with their weird act of adoration that they were making ready to sacrifice two other women when the police intervened.

It was to perpetuate this hell upon earth that the government abolished human and divine law!

The weight of the crimes perpetrated by the Tsarist State may be said to have dragged it into the abyss. For it fell mechanically, so to say. Neither in 1905 nor in 1917 was the revolution methodically planned.<sup>1</sup> In the former year there were only three thousand socialists and one thousand social revolutionists in the capital, yet even then the upheaval would probably have been successful if there had been one strong man on their side. On the other hand, the outbreak of 1917 might have been repressed if the Tsar had had a man of grit in his service. In 1905 there were a number of secret societies in the army spreading sedition among the soldiers, whereas in 1917 there would appear to have been none. To method, organisation, or leadership, therefore, the success of the movement cannot fairly be ascribed, nor even to the concerted action of the revolutionary parties. Indeed, it is worth noting that neither in preparing the upheaval nor in moderating or shaping it did the so-called revolutionary parties play a prominent or a perceptible part. Nor was it until the upshot of the sudden convulsion was manifest and the Petersburg Council of Working Men and Soldiers was formed that the groups of the extreme Left bestirred themselves and strode into the foreground. It is no exaggeration, therefore, to affirm that the Russian revolution was not the work of the professional revolutionists, but came to pass independently of their exertions.

The army as a whole was loyal to the monarchy. The

<sup>1</sup> I received from some of the principal Bolsheviks letters to the effect that it would break out at the end of March or the beginning of April, and taking these intimations together with other symptoms I felt pretty sure that the date was correct. But a wide-awake government could have adjourned it until the end of the war.

officers who desired the deposition of the "Colonel," as Nicholas II. was commonly called in military circles, were a very small minority, and, so far as I have ascertained, the army was free from those secret soldiers' organisations which spread disaffection and fostered rebellion in the year 1905.<sup>1</sup> The street tumults which ushered in the troubles, for which the minister Protopopoff had made all requisite preparations, were caused appropriately enough by the deliberate provocation of his secret police and by the artificial scarcity of food which he had of set purpose brought about. Here again we are confronted with that poetic justice of which we have had so many curious instances since the year 1914.

If it had not been for the mutiny of the reserve battalions of the Guards, Protopopoff could and would have carried out his programme, mown down the discontented citizens with his machine guns, and proceeded to rule Russia with a rod of iron. Nay, even if these contingents had remained inactive, the government would have scored a sanguinary victory. The soldiers mutinied in obedience, not to an order from a superior officer, but to a spontaneous impulse of their own.

These remarks are confirmed by the circumstance that none of the leaders of the revolutionary or extremist parties lost their lives in the street-fighting—a proof of the suddenness and rapidity with which the movement was unchained and developed.

While the riots in the capital were still proceeding, a number of prominent party men foregathered in the Technological Institute and, after the manner of 1905, organised a council of workmen to control the acts of the government. But it was the soldiers, not the workmen, who had just turned the scales against Tsarism, and some one present, who bore the fact in mind, proposed that the name of the organisation should be amended to Council of Workmen and Soldiers.<sup>2</sup> The motion was acclaimed, and this seemingly insignificant addition—"and soldiers"—to the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Russkaya Svoboda*, No. 4, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

appellation engendered a far-reaching change in the direction of the revolutionary stream, which thenceforward flowed away from the Duma towards the army.

The soldiers whose sudden revolt had defeated the government were astonished next day to find themselves thus classed as revolutionaries and made co-heirs of these in the kingdom of liberty that was about to come. But they had no lively expectation of speedily entering into their inheritance, for after a few days' fighting in the streets they returned to their barracks ready to recommence the old routine anew. The Tsar was still on the throne. The war was raging at the fronts. The military organism had undergone no essential change, and so far as it was concerned the only difference to be anticipated—after the abdication of Nicholas II.—was that its supreme head would have been the military commission of the Duma. That was the goal towards which things military were manifestly wending. It was desired by the parliamentary chiefs, it was demanded by the generals, it was acquiesced in by the soldiers themselves.

But circumstance, stronger than the will of men, impressed a new movement on the stream of events and changed the history of Russia and of Europe. The intelligentsia, which so often in opposition had unwittingly marred opportunity, balked statesmanlike effort, and clogged the wheels of progress, now invested with power, issued the famous Edict No. 1 "democratising" the army. Elections were ordered for representatives of the soldiers to the Petersburg<sup>1</sup> Council, military discipline was abolished, and the nation's weapon, the army, was shattered. . . . Thus the Bologna phial of the Tsardom was scratched by the author of that order and all its molecules were scattered in the winds.

What I had foreseen and foretold twelve years before had come to pass. The intelligentsia, finding themselves at the head of affairs, ruined Russia's cause and their own. Word-weavers and theory-importers, they sacrificed the Duma to the army, the army to the anarchists, and their country to the foreign enemy for the sake of the merest claptrap. During

<sup>1</sup> The capital is still called Petersburg by the Bolshevik government.



the attempts at revolution in 1906 I wrote: "Speaking of the Russian Empire which Nicholas II. received from his father, Alexander III., one may say with as much certitude as such contingent judgments admit, that it could have been governed at least for another forty or fifty years without a constitution. But on condition that it was *governed*. The Prussians of the days of Frederick the Great were much more intelligent than the Russians of to-day, yet they enjoyed absolutism and thrived under it. But then although absolute it was really government, and justice was its basis. The Russians of to-day—the masses of benighted peasantry—are unfitted to govern the Empire, and for that reason a strong autocracy might have long continued in power. But even peasants will not endure starvation by inches, which was what absolutism offered to many of them. Like the worm, the *Mooshik* will turn when trodden on. The Russian people now demand a constitution, not because they are already fitted for it, but because the bureaucracy is no longer capable of carrying on the system of absolutism. The process by which the necessity of a radical change has been impressed upon the consciousness of the people was long and circuitous, but the result is there and cannot be reasoned away. To the will of the nation the government can oppose only the bayonets of the troops, and even the tempered steel of bayonets will not long support a throne devoid of all other props. And that is now the relative position of the autocracy and the army.

"The troops are not yet disaffected as a whole. The great majority of the soldiers are still devoted to the Tsar and obedient to his officers. But the work of disintegration is going on rapidly, and may, nay must, in the end prove thorough. . . . In five years, three years, or a few months the army may go over to the enemy. And then? *Then the anarchists will have triumphed.*

"The tactics of the revolutionists are, perhaps, efficacious from a purely party point of view; from the standpoint of the Empire they are disastrous. They remind one of the fabulous Chinaman who burned down his hut in order to

roast a pig. To revolutionise the army is not merely to put a spoke in the wheel of the monarchy, it is to ruin the whole nation. For anarchists this policy is conceivable, but not for any political party, however eager to pull down the prevailing political system. To sow the seed of disaffection among the troops is to deprive the nation of its one weapon of defence, to place the people and all that they possess at the mercy of the foreign foe.”<sup>1</sup>

Trite though these axioms may be they were not assimilated, and although the consequences of disregarding them were obviously sinister and manifest, nothing was undertaken to dislodge their cause. The circumstance that among the intelligentsia there was no mind receptive, flexible, and resourceful enough for constructive revolutionary leadership materially contributed to render the downfall of the Tsardom tantamount to the dismemberment of Russia.

Thus the upheaval, which lacked a constructive idea and a statesmanlike leader, was neither organised nor foreseen nor prepared for. It was a spontaneous movement of the Russian Enceladus to ease his suffering, and it shook the politico-social fabric to its nethermost foundations. All Russia was still one and undivided. Nor was it until the autocracy had been pulled down by the shock that various material interests laid hold of the revolutionary forces and began to use them for particular and unhallowed ends. What at the outset was the instinctive effort of a gigantic entity to right and save itself became immediately afterwards a process of gangrenous decomposition. No sooner had the whole nation risen up as one man against Tsarism than a sequence of struggles began of one interest against another, whereby the chaotic flood which had long seethed and hissed below the smooth unified surface maintained by the Tsardom burst into the light of day and overwhelmed the country and its peoples.

In the Bolshevik movement there is not the vestige of a constructive or social idea. Even the Western admirers of Lenin and Trotzky cannot discover any. Genuine socialism

<sup>1</sup> *Contemporary Review*, August, 1906, pp. 286 and 287.

means the organic ordering of the social whole, and of this in the Bolshevik process there is no trace. Far from that, a part is treated as the whole and the remainder is no better off than were the serfs under Alexander I. and Nicholas I. For Bolshevism is Tsarism upside down. To capitalists it metes out treatment as bad as that which the Tsars dealt to serfs. It suppresses newspapers, forbids liberty of the press, arrests or banishes the elected of the nation, and connives at or encourages crimes of diabolical ferocity.

It is charitable to assume that the intelligentsia would not have abandoned the Duma and the army if they had understood their own people and foreseen its behaviour in a state of freedom from restraint. One hopes that they knew not what they did. One of their own spiritual chiefs now agrees with what I wrote of them in the days when Alexander II. was Tsar. "Russians," he says, "readily abandon themselves to dreams, illusion, and self-deception. They are easily fascinated by the possibility of speedily bringing down upon earth the definite kingdom of justice, the social paradise, but they lack the sterner, the more masculine and responsible virtues. Deliberate toil has no charms for the Russian people. They rely for everything upon catastrophic leaps and bounds from the realm of necessity into the realm of liberty. The Russians have been demoralised by autocracy and morally crippled by protracted slavery, by the ingrained habit of trusting for everything to the ruling and the predominant classes. And the past has flung its forbidding shadow across our present and our future. As a counterweight to the flattery now in vogue it behoves us to proclaim frankly that in the Russian people there is a fatal lack of honour, and this defect is a consequence of their long continued thralldom. This lack of honour and the utter absence among them of the sense of responsibility and duty are lightly cloaked with social theories permeated with the poison of flattery administered to the popular masses." <sup>1</sup>

In response to the call of the well-meaning intelligentsia, who made their evocations efficacious by adding to them the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. N. Berdyayeff, *Russkaya Svoboda*, Nos. 12-13, pp. 5 and 6.

sacrifice of the Duma and the army, the spirit of anarchy arose from the deep and cannot now be laid. Chaos may, therefore, rage on, spreading ruin in Russia until it reaches the point of self-negation. By that time, however, and congruously with that disastrous void, the configuration of Europe may have definitely changed. That is the danger which I have long apprehended and desired to see warded off. For it obviously meant internal disruption and German domination. That is why I wrote when the breakdown of the autocracy began with the abortive revolution of eleven years ago: "Without claiming to descry things further ahead than the average politician, one might make a heavy wager that *before Russia resumes her lost position among the nations of the earth, Germany will have won for herself at the expense of her neighbours a position of prestige and power unexampled in European history since the Middle Ages.*"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Contemporary Review*, August, 1906, p. 271.

## POSTSCRIPT

I MADE that forecast in the year 1906 and everything that has happened since tended to confirm it.

But what of the future? the reader may ask. Have Russia's sands indeed run down? Will her dissolution not be followed by a glorious resurrection? In answer to these and kindred questions it may be pointed out that the province of the historian and that of his less ambitious auxiliaries is to supply the public with relevant and well-sifted facts, not with forecasts that cannot be verified.

From the partial sketch outlined in the foregoing pages it may seem to follow that the Russian people has been not merely knocked out of the lists as a belligerent, but also permanently incapacitated as a nation for a prominent part in the politico-social progress of the world. And one may ask why I have refrained from drawing this conclusion? For if it be true that the bulk of the population is intellectually benighted, morally obtuse, politically indifferent, and socially incohesive, it follows that it is also insensible to the only motives strong enough to determine such an effort as would make regeneration possible. Not even an army can be raised until these conditions are remedied. And an army is but the first of a long series of conditions requisite for a new birth. When Russia has national forces again, she will be in possession of a most important element of renewed vitality, but only of one. And as yet she is still far removed even from that.

Those who reason thus are assuming that the future development of mankind will run on the lines of its past progress. And the grounds for this assumption are inadequate. Yet oddly enough, many of these critics are also zealous champions of the supremacy of right over force and of arbitration as a substitute for war, and these doctrines, warped it may be and discoloured, are to be discerned at the roots of Russia's great renunciation. It must therefore be

acknowledged that the Russian people are in a more fitting mood to listen to President Wilson's scheme of future reconstruction than any of their neighbours. That the various parts of the Tsardom will be put together again and the breath of life poured into the reintegrated and rejuvenated organism is to my thinking improbable. The principle of national self-determination for which the Allies profess to be fighting is apparently an effectual barrier to this were there no other. The utmost that one can hope is that the Russian race will unite and come into its own.

The majority of the nation is still hardly more than raw material for the State-builder. It lacks almost all the advantages which religion, education, instruction, political training, economic development, and intercourse with progressive peoples have bestowed on its competitors, and it is hampered with the vices which a grinding and ruthless tyranny working unhindered for centuries succeeded in grafting on its impressionable soul. That so much of what is humane still survives in the Russian—his natural religion of pity, his pitiless self-criticism, his enthusiasm for noble causes, his detachment from the grosser sides of life, and the cheerful alacrity with which he will die for an idea or a friend—bespeaks an equipment, intellectual and moral, which if properly cultivated may reasonably be expected to bring forth excellent fruits.

One cannot fully understand the first act of the Russian revolution until the curtain has fallen on the last, nor before one has seen the channels traced by circumstance for the civilising currents of the future is it possible to divine the part in the making of history which the nation will be qualified to play. Ages of ignorance and serfdom may have suspended but have not wholly crushed the freedom of spirit, the fellow-feeling for suffering, and the embryonic humanities characteristic of the race. These qualities, freed from the many and noxious weeds with which they are still entangled, may yet make of Russia a potent social force capable of being directed to a high ethical purpose.

E. J. DILLON.

## APPENDIX

### DETAILS OF THE SECRET TREATY

WITTE narrated to me in detail his experiences in Paris, his talks with the French Premier, and what came of them. Suddenly he received from the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs the telegram: "Kaiser Wilhelm invites you to visit him at Rominten. His Majesty the Tsar desires you to repair thither on your way home."

This imperial behest was the outcome of an exchange of telegrams that had taken place between Wilhelm II. and Nicholas II. On 4th September, the Kaiser, who was then at Rominten, had telegraphed to the Tsar: "Witte is, as I hear, on his return journey. Would you allow him to visit me *en passant* on his way to Russia? as I intend decorating him on account of the coming into existence of the treaty of commerce which he concluded last year with Bülow. Happy cruise! Our manœuvres most interesting in lovely country, but very wet! Best love to Alix. Willy." On 11th September Wilhelm again telegraphs: "By your kind order Witte will be here on 26/13. Is he informed of our treaty? Am I to tell him about it if he is not? Best love to Alix. Killed four stags here, nothing especially big. Weather cool and fine. *Waldmanns Heil!*" To this question the Tsar despatched the following answer: "Till now the Grand Duke Nikolas, the War Minister, the chief of general staff, and Lamsdorff are informed about treaty. Have nothing against your telling Witte about it. Enjoying my stay on the *Polar Star*, dry fine weather. Best love from Alix. *Waldmanns Dank*. Nicky." Consequently Nicholas II. had no objection to the Kaiser's opening the matter to Witte. But the evidence goes to show that it was not done.

"After having received this telegram I remained only two days longer in the French capital and then set out for Rominten. You know how I was received there. Frederic could not have been more cordial towards Voltaire when

the great Frenchman arrived at Potsdam. The Kaiser seemed transfigured. His face was a sequence of smiles. His every tone and gesture a spell. He talked of various topical subjects. But before touching upon that of France and Morocco, the Kaiser looking at me searchingly asked, 'Do you remember our talk about the new ordering of Europe some ten years back?' and then he reflected as though he were brightening up the traits of the picture in his mind. 'Ten years ago you gave expression to an opinion that caused me to meditate much and anxiously upon the affairs of Europe, the decay of the old continent, the rise of young and robust nations, and the special part which we, the order-bringing races, are foredestined to play. Let me recall that conversation. You said that the nations of Europe should as far as possible imitate the North American States, combine for a permanent and common end, should cease to squander the best part of their wealth in arms, and to risk the noblest of their achievements in intestine wars, and that they should cease to wage fiscal and economic struggles as they now do.'

"Here I interrupted him and said that to the best of my recollection I had pleaded for the separation of political and economic aims. 'Yes, yes,' he rejoined, 'but that is only a detail. If we were as free from that exhausting drainage as the United States are, what a difference it would make to us and to the world! The price paid for this consummation would shrink to nothing in comparison with the benefits it would confer. Europe as a State system might then reckon on a life of thousands of years, whereas if we go on snarling and biting as at present the process of decay will not be arrested. Europe will die as Egypt died, and Assyria and Rome. Now my people do not want to perish in this inglorious way. They are capable of great things and burning to accomplish them. So, no doubt, are yours. Are these your views still?' 'They are, sire.' 'I am glad to know it. But it could not be otherwise. Every fair-minded person who can see the present stagnation in Europe as it really is, and discern the decay it involves, and who longs for health-



bringing activity, pacific progress, economic order, must feel drawn towards our ideas. What is wanted is not a holy alliance or any mere temporary coalition, but something grander and more enduring, an organism that can live and grow and thrive. Mere treaties will not work the transformation. These outward ties are useful and even necessary as splints and ligatures to hold the parts together until their union becomes organic as it now is in the German States, or if you prefer it, in the United States of North America. These States are separated by enormous distances. Their economic interests, far from being identical or similar, are in some cases in conflict one with the other, and in any case there are complicating conditions. But the States contrive to hit it off all the same. Well, the same result might, I am certain, be achieved in Europe, if the problem were deftly handled. Why should it not be? It is my conviction that the time is ripe for such a glorious undertaking. All that we need are the right men. And if I had such a statesman as you, I should have no misgivings about the end. I would appoint you to the chancellorship, give you *carte blanche* to realise in your own way my cherished scheme of polity, and I feel sure that it would assume a shape duly proportioned to the magnitude of the new political creation. But after all you are not so very far away. Petersburg and Berlin are next-door neighbours. And we have the telegraph wires to keep us in touch. I can always have the benefit of your advice.

“By the way, I was much struck with certain remarks you made when you and I first talked this matter over. You said that the political and economic aspects of the project of the United States of Europe ought to be kept apart and dealt with as far as possible separately. But in this case they have had to go together. Another observation you then made appealed to me still more strongly. You talked of France as an indispensable element of the new federation. There you were absolutely right. I agree with you fully. It must be our first aim to win over France. You discerned that from the outset. You know the temperament of the

French people. And they are your admirers. Your name is a clarion to them now. They can refuse you nothing. You rescued Russia, their friend and ally. Well, I want your precious collaboration. Will you use your influence to do what is feasible towards furthering the cause of Europe? I can rely on you?' 'Most certainly, sire, you can. I will do everything in my power compatible with my duty to my country and my sovereign. Your Majesty overrates my influence, but not my goodwill.' 'You will hold the reins of power in Russia after your return. Of that there is little doubt. I have a bit of good news for you. Your Emperor and I have lately exchanged views on this matter, and we are agreed with you on the principle, so that the conversation of ours at Björke marks progress. We have exchanged ideas on the subject and are decided to act together. You still hold all your old views?' 'Yes, sire, without modification.' 'Very well. You have reason to rejoice. We are making headway. What we are aiming at is, as you yourself termed it, the establishment of a political syndicate which is to harness all the social and political forces of the old continent and to use them to keep the machine of general government moving for the welfare of all, while leaving room enough for the play of divergent forces and the pursuit of divergent interests. You hit the nail on the head when you likened it to a syndicate.'

"It was in that sense if not in those identical words that the Kaiser addressed me. He scanned me closely from time to time while he spoke, and also whenever I replied. He was nimbler in his movements than I had seen him on former occasions, and also more visibly preoccupied by his subject. It seemed a kind of possession. He was also generous in his praise of the Tsar, and anxious to learn any opinion about the internal situation in Russia. He cross-examined me about the French statesmen I had seen, about Rouvier and Delcassé, about the mood of the French people, and kindred matters. I gave him my impressions and then asked him to enable me to do a favour to the French. He accorded it with the best grace in the world. And I obtained

from him the concession about the Algeciras Conference which Rouvier had so often asked for in vain. In this way war was prevented. Altogether the Kaiser treated me during my visit as though I were a reigning potentate. When we drove in the motor he himself acted as my chauffeur, and again reverted to the question of welding continental Europe into a co-operative association, and to the need of energetic seconding from me now, and still more when I was entrusted by the Tsar with the reins of government. I remember the last words I uttered to him at this our last meeting. I said, 'I will do my part. But I would ask you, sire, to send energetic ambassadors to all the capitals concerned, ambassadors who will pursue a definite, clear-cut policy in this direction. And then in ten years the idea may perhaps be realised. If when your Majesty and I first talked the project over you had done this, it would probably have been realised by now!'

"Since then I have corresponded with the Kaiser, but I have never seen him."

The above account of what passed at Rominten during Witte's visit was given to me by the Russian statesman himself on many occasions; three or four times at least he dictated it, and now and again when talking of other matters he would add in some new touch. He always assured me emphatically that the Kaiser never alluded in more lucid terms than those I have given to the important transactions that had passed between the two monarchs at Björke. "I left Russia," he said, "without knowing that an interview was projected, and I returned home without any information about the act for which the interview had been brought about." I knew Witte intimately, and I believed him implicitly. And yet the Kaiser had asked and received the Tsar's permission to initiate the future Russian Premier into the secret. What kept him back? Witte told me that he attributed this semi-reserve to Wilhelm's apprehension that Witte would flare up as he had done when he discovered the Kiao Chow accord, cause great unpleasantness, and perhaps upset the covenant, whereas if his own Tsar broke

the news to him directly or through Lamsdorff after he had expressed approval of the principle he would resign himself.

What was that treaty of the existence of which even at the end of September hardly more than seven persons were aware? The best answer to that is to be found in the confidential telegrams which passed between the two Emperors unknown to the Russian ministers and led to the signing of the compact. These messages are interesting as human documents, and also as illustrations of the arbitrary, underhand, conspirative manner in which Nicholas II. discharged the functions which had, he imagined, been entrusted to him by the Deity. They extend over a span of time reaching from June, 1904, down to the date of the Kaiser's visit to Björke, and they afford one a glimpse of the skill and knowledge of character displayed by Wilhelm II. in laying his snare for the weak-willed, conceited occupant of the throne of Peter. The deep instinct of the Hohenzollern for the promotion of his country's interests in the first place, and of his subjects' industrial interests in the second place, was awake from start to finish. It is instructive to watch the irresolution of the faint-hearted Russian, his willingness to take a step that might confer on him distinction as a statesman, his subsequent apprehension of its consequences, not to his country and people, but to his own puny self, his desire to confess the delinquency almost as soon as he had committed it, and to obtain forgiveness from the French, and of his acquiescence in the overmastering will of the tempter, despite the promptings of his own instincts. Whatever one may think of the immorality of the Hohenzollern, there is little to be urged against his faith in the law of cause and effect.

The problem Wilhelm II. had to solve was the same that he had almost settled during the Boer war. Had he then subdued the impulse of impatience which comes naturally to his temperament, and gone to work with boldness, tact, and method, he would undoubtedly have attracted France to his side again and induced her to work in concert with Germany and Russia, as Witte had done at the time of

the cancelling of the Shimonoseki Treaty. Muravieff, on Russia's behalf, was ready to march. M. Delcassé, it has been affirmed, would have followed his example if he had not been scared by the prospect of having to guarantee conjointly with Russia the European possessions of Germany, including, of course, Alsace and Lorraine. This time the aim was essentially the same, but the elements of the problem were more favourable. However, the Kaiser had a larger choice of means. Russia was engrossed by Japan, and her power counted for nothing in Europe. Consequently only France needed to be won over, and the goal would have been reached. This stroke might have been effected either by blandishments or constraint. And if only the Tsar could be enlisted on Germany's side, then, to Wilhelm's thinking, the rest of the problem was plain sailing. For Russia could be used to decoy her ally into the camp of the Central Empires, or else her own infidelity would revolt and isolate the French. In the early part of his reign the Kaiser, in quest of a third ally, had oscillated between Russia and England, but since the Anglo-French Entente, and all that that seemed to him to imply, he felt that Britain was the enemy, and he shaped his action accordingly.<sup>1</sup> This action was directed to the conclusion of a secret treaty with Russia which, when the opportune hour should strike—and the sooner the better—would be dangled before the eyes of the French nation. France would then have to follow Russia into the Teuton camp or else dissociate herself from her ally, and the consequences of either choice would be satisfactory to Kaiser Wilhelm. All the probabilities, however, as they mirrored themselves in the mind of the sanguine German, were in favour of a complete reconciliation with the republic.

But secrecy was of the very essence of success. An imprudent word, a premature allusion, and all would be lost.

<sup>1</sup> I have convincing reasons for saying that the Kaiser firmly believes, as do most Britons, that King Edward discussed with the Tsar at Reval the attitude which their respective governments should assume towards Germany. It is a fact that that topic was never even alluded to.

For the French government must be taken unawares, stunned by the accomplished, the irrevocable fact, and constrained suddenly to adopt a friendly or a hostile attitude towards it by sinking into resignation or rising to revolt. Then and only then could the intended result be secured. That the Kaiser should have thought it possible to obtain the willing aid of Nicholas II. for the execution of such an infamous design on the Tsardom's best friends indicates his low estimate of the Russian's moral worth and soundness of intelligence. That he succeeded so completely demonstrates the correctness of his conception. One cannot but recognise that, whatever blunders were made by the Germans before and during the Great War in forecasting the action of this or that people, the Kaiser in the tactics he adopted towards his brother sovereign is a master example of clear-eyed psychological penetration. With his view of morality he may well take pride in what was undoubtedly a brilliant feat.

Nicholas II., representing the Tsardom and its peoples, was on the most friendly footing with France. He had already committed a grievous blunder, which was hardly to be distinguished from a crime against the alliance, by leading his country into a disastrous war against Japan which had shorn him of his prestige, disheartened his army, and thrown his entire Empire out of gear. And Germany had hastened to make capital out of his folly. The Morocco tangle was held up to be unravelled, and the Kaiser's ministers insisted that it should be done in their way and under their supervision. The French Minister of Foreign Affairs, who demurred and took up the position that ratified treaties must be respected, was removed by his own colleagues congruously with the demand made by the German emissary, Henckel von Donnersmarck, who visited Paris for the purpose. Since then the French government had been enduring the tortures of suspense. War clouds hung heavy in the firmament. The German government had declared to the French Premier through its ambassador in Paris that unless the international conference it demanded

were agreed to, "you must bear in mind that Germany with all its forces is at the back of Morocco." <sup>1</sup> The German Chancellor exhorted the French ambassador <sup>2</sup> "not to linger on a path bordered by precipices and even abysses."

That was the moment chosen by the Kaiser to begin the weaving of his spells around the soulless figure-head that sat upon the Russian throne. And the pitiful semblance of a monarch saw nothing preposterous, nothing incongruous, in the proposal made to him.

The confidential telegrams are instructive, and from various points of view well worth studying. The Kaiser's tone when alluding to "Uncle Albert" or "Uncle Bertie" (Edward VII.) at first respectful, and then almost unfriendly as England's influence on Russia becomes more and more sensible; his assumption that Nicholas II. will not make peace yet but will risk his entire fleet and sink deeper into the bog; his tender friendship for his brother sovereign, which suddenly turns into angry surprise accompanied by unmistakable threats when a Russian cruiser seizes a German steamer <sup>3</sup> and commits an act of "piracy," and the congruous alteration of his signature from Willy to Wilhelm—are all traits of which neither the politician nor the psychologist will miss the significance. The anxious solicitude of the Kaiser for the honour and the military victory of Russia has a ring about it which recalls some of Mephisto's phrases, as for example when he urges the Tsar to order the ships in the Far East to make a supreme dash against those of the enemy and foretells the result: "The vessels in the harbour are, of course, the main attraction for the Japanese (*sic*). I hope they will make a try for the Japanese fleet, and if they manage to run down or smash or damage the four line-of-battleships left to Japan, though they themselves may perish too, they will have done their duty: shattering the strength of the Japanese' sea power, and preparing the way for the Baltic fleet's victorious success on

<sup>1</sup> Words addressed to M. Rouvier by Prince Radolin on 13th June.

<sup>2</sup> M. Bihourd.

<sup>3</sup> The *Scandia*.

its arrival, in winning easily against a damaged antagonist, unable to repair his ships or build new ones in time. Then the sea power is back in your hands, and the Japanese's land forces are at your mercy; then you sound the 'general advance' for your army, and the enemy! Hallali." <sup>1</sup>

Again, note how insidiously the descendant of Frederic the Anti-Machiavellian suggests that the Tsar should hold out because Japan's resources are fast ebbing and she is making desperate efforts to obtain peace, and Manchuria, and is being helped by perfidious Albion: "I think the strings of all these doings lead across the Channel." <sup>2</sup> A few days later the Tsar thanks him, and says that he is not quite certain whether "the strings of these doings lead across the Channel or perhaps the Atlantic. You may be sure that Russia shall fight this war to the end until the last Jap is driven out of Manchuria, only then can come the talk about peace negotiations, and that solely between the two belligerents. May God help us. Hearty thanks for your loyal friendship, which I trust beyond anything. Nicky." <sup>3</sup>

That was peculiarly characteristic of Nicholas II., "to trust beyond anything" the man whose interest it was to circumvent him, and to distrust and discredit the most patriotic and genial statesman of his own country.

At all costs the Tsar has to be isolated. Uncle Albert must be rendered suspect. <sup>4</sup> The Americans, too, who in the person of Roosevelt may bring the Tsar to reason, must be debarred in advance, and debarred they are accordingly. Russia has been victimised in English waters, among the Hull fishermen off the Dogger Bank there was "foul play," the fishermen themselves "have already acknowledged that they have seen foreign steamcraft among their boats,

<sup>1</sup>In the despatch sent from Hubertustock on 25th September (8th October), 1904.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Confidential Despatch of 6th/19th October, 1904.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Confidential Despatch dated 10th/23rd October, 1904. It is instructive to watch the way in which suspicion is attached now to this person, now to that. The Tsar, Witte complained to me, made the King of England look upon Witte as a man not to be trusted. The Kaiser moved the Tsar to regard the King of England as insincere and an intriguer. . . .

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Confidential Despatch, No. 15.



not belonging to their fishing fleet, which they knew not! So there has been foul play! I think the British Embassy in Petersburg must know these news." And so this outpouring of poisonous virus, which the mental organism of the poor, degenerate Russian was predisposed to assimilate, went on unceasingly. The august head of the German people posed before him whom he had recently saluted as admiral of the Pacific as a sort of head spy who had numerous other spies under him. And to his beloved friend he hurried with the precious information thus collected, whenever it appeared likely to be of use. It was in this unchivalrous capacity that he discovered the "foul play" of which Admiral Roshdjestvensky was "the victim" in the North Sea, and that he was able to write: <sup>1</sup> "From reliable source (*sic*) in India I am secretly informed that expedition *à la Tibet* is being quickly prepared for Afghanistan. It is meant to bring that country for once and all under British influence, if possible direct suzerainty.<sup>2</sup> The expedition is to leave end of this month. The only not English European in Afghanistan service, the director of the arms manufactory of the Emir, a German gentleman, has been murdered as *preamble* to the action." And four days later he asserts that: "My statement about India in last telegram are (*sic*) corroborated by the speech of Lord Selborne, who alluded to Afghanistan question."<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, with these and similar items of "news," the Tsar was treated with a constant stream of information, which was meant to touch him more closely and stimulate him to make common cause with Germany, who alone was befriending him in his own and his country's straits. Thus he complains that the English press "has been threatening Germany on no account to allow coals to be sent to Baltic fleet now on its way out. It is not impossible that the

<sup>1</sup>On 2nd/15th November, 1904.

<sup>2</sup>This untruth impressed the Tsar profoundly. He remembered it when M. Izvolsky was negotiating with Sir Arthur Nicolson to arrange a convention, and he insisted stubbornly on obtaining for Russia a frontier contiguous to Afghanistan. With difficulty M. Izvolsky had his way.

<sup>3</sup>Confidential Despatch of 6th/19th November, 1904.

Japanese and British government may lodge a joint protest against our coaling your ships, coupled with a *sommation* to stop further work. The result aimed at by such a threat of war would be the absolute immobility of your fleet, and inability to proceed to its destination from want of fuel. This new danger would have to be faced *in community by Russia and Germany together*, who would both have to remind your ally France of obligations she has taken over in the treaty of dual alliance with you, in the case of *casus faderis* arising. It is out of the question that France on such an invitation would try to shirk her implicit duty towards her ally. Though Delcassé is an anglophile *enragé*, he will be wise enough to understand that the British fleet is utterly unable to save Paris.”<sup>1</sup>

And these things told. The Tsar, left largely to himself and his immediate surroundings, with no trusted adviser, is deeply touched by what he thus learns from this disinterested friend about the wickedness of England and the coldness of France. All that was now wanted to crown the work was one of those unforeseen incalculable incidents with which war is fraught. And it duly came to pass. Admiral Roshdestvensky, in a fit of nervousness akin to temporary folly, fired on the harmless fishermen off the Dogger Bank, provoking an outburst of anger in the British press. Thereupon the Kaiser's victory was secured. “I agree fully,” the Tsar writes, “with your complaints about England's behaviour concerning the coaling of our ships by German steamers, whereas she understands the rules of keeping neutrality in her own fashion. It is certainly high time to put a stop to this. The only way, as you say, would be that Germany, Russia, and France should at once unite upon an arrangement to abolish Anglo-Japanese arrogance and insolence. Would you like to lay down and frame the outlines of such a treaty and let me know it? As soon as accepted by us, France is bound to join her ally. This com-

<sup>1</sup> Confidential Despatch, No. 13. The italics are mine. Here the Kaiser favours intimidation, but it is on the end that he fixes his gaze, not on the means.

bination has often come to my mind; it will mean peace and rest for the world. Best love from Alix. Nicky." Here we have the origin of the secret treaty. "The only way, as you say." And the Tsar requests his brother potentate who has had this brilliant idea to formulate it in a treaty. And as for the republic, which is in a fever of excitement apprehending an onslaught of the Germans, who are bullying it incessantly, the solution is facile: "France is bound to join her ally." Bound. Morally? By treaty? . . . What is an obligation as Wilhelm II. understands it?

Perseveringly the Kaiser went on in his underhand, sneaking way, fanning the embers until the flame appeared which was to shrivel and consume the Franco-Russian scrap of paper. The imperial detective has always a budget of news ready for his dreamy correspondent and adapted to the end in view. "I hear from trustworthy private source," (*sic*), he writes, "that the authorities in Tokio are getting anxious at the future outlook."<sup>1</sup> No more scientific poisoner of the wells of public information is known to mankind than the German Press Bureau in the Wilhelmstrasse, Berlin, and it may well be doubted whether the cleverest and least scrupulous member of that institution could successfully emulate the crowned head of the German State. Here is a superlatively knavish way of inventing rumours and dishing them up with his poisonous sauce. "My suspicions accordingly, that the Japanese are trying secretly to get other power to mediate because they are now at the height of their successes, have proved correct. Lansdowne has asked Hayashi to intimate to England the conditions upon which Japan would conclude peace. They were telegraphed from Tokio, but were so preposterous that even blustering Lansdowne thought them too strong, and urged Hayashi to tone them down. When they made a wry face and difficulties, Lansdowne added, 'Of course England will take good care that a mediæval Russia will be kept well out of Manchuria, Korea, etc., so that *de facto* Japan will get all she wants.' That is the point the British have in their eye when they

<sup>1</sup> Confidential Despatch of 6th/19th November, 1904.

speaking of friendship and friendly mediation. France, as I hear from Japan, is already informed of these plans, and of course a party to this arrangement, taking—as usual in the new *entente cordiale*—the side of England. They are going to offer you a bit of Persia as compensation, of course far from the shore of the gulf which England means to annex herself, fearing you might have access to the warm sea, which you must by right, as Persia is bound to fall under Russian control and government. This would give her a splendid commercial opening, which England wants to debar you from.”<sup>1</sup>

Lest this deadly hash of untruths should appear to Nicholas II. as what it really was, his august friend went on to remark modestly and offhandedly: “Your diplomatists will have reported all this to you before, but I thought, nevertheless, it my duty to inform you of all I knew, all of which are authentic serious news from absolute trustworthy sources.” Trustworthy sources indeed!

The Tsar’s request for the “outlines of a treaty” was granted speedily. The day after it was received an imperial messenger left for Tsarskoye Selo, carrying the draft which the Kaiser had already put together. It had a long preamble unattached to the document itself—a sort of justification for it, which the Tsar found “very interesting.” What remarks the proposed covenant elicited I am now unable to say. I have grounds, however, for believing, and I find among the notes which are at present before me a statement written down in the year 1906 that this first draft provided for a triple alliance for Germany, Russia, and France, whereas the second project, brought to Tsarskoye Selo on 20th November by Count Lamsdorff himself,<sup>2</sup> left out all mention of

<sup>1</sup> Confidential Despatch of 6th/19th November, 1904.

<sup>2</sup> Not to be confounded with the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Lamsdorff. The other was the special representative of the Kaiser attached to the person of the Tsar just as Shebeko first and Tatishcheff later were personal envoys of the Tsar attached to the person of the Kaiser. These double embassies gave the Germans an advantage over the French which I was once requested to explain to a certain French Prime Minister in the hope that the government of the republic would introduce a like arrangement.

France except in the last clause, which stipulated that efforts would be made to induce the French nation to come into the alliance.

Parenthetically I may say that the first draft was first given to me by mistake for the actual treaty. But the error was soon perceived and corrected. Since the revolution certain Russian newspapers, informed, it has been alleged, by relatives of an ex-minister, announce that the document was an offensive and defensive treaty. Others again describe it as a convention directed against France. My friend Witte never construed the object of the covenant in that way, but he argued, erroneously, that the letter of the treaty was capable of being turned against France and regarded as a Russo-German agreement with its point aimed at the republic. And that it was which aroused his indignation.

It may be thought surprising that a monarch like Nicholas II., who had been brought up in the atmosphere of the court, taught by men of integrity like Pobiedonostseff and Witte, and initiated into foreign politics by Lobanoff and Lamsdorff, should have had his judgment so warped and his ideas so "coloured" that he failed to suspect the wiles of his seducer, the drift of the proposal, or the necessary effect which the projected alliance must have on Russia's relations with France. It is, however, idle to vituperate the mental anarchy and moral blindness which prevented him from seeing how completely he was separating his country from France, and how impossible it was to distinguish this abandonment from the blackest kind of treason. Any moral faculty Nicholas II. may have possessed at the outset of his reign—and it must have been extremely slight—had long since been drained by self-worship and presumption. To one order of considerations he was still, however, susceptible: the opinion of the chiefs of influential nations who had trusted him. What he asks himself when he has the fateful document in its final shape before him is, What will the French say? How will they judge me? Affrighted by the answer he desires to beat a retreat, and with his shallow cunning he feigns to be especially solicitous about gaining

the support of the French and offers that as a motive for breaking his promise of secrecy. Yet he has not the courage to do this without the permission of the tempter in whose toils he is.

“Before signing the last draft of treaty I think it advisable to let the French see it. As long as it is not signed one can make small modifications in the text, whereas if already approved by us both it will seem as if we tried to enforce the treaty on France. In this case a failure might easily happen which I think is not your wish. Therefore I ask your agreement to acquaint the government of France with this project and upon getting their answer shall at once let you know by telegraph. Nicky.”<sup>1</sup>

Secrecy, as I pointed out, was of the essence of the scheme. If the French Premier had had an inkling of what was brewing just then, he would have presented a note which the Tsar's government would be compelled to treat as an ultimatum and Nicholas II. would have realised that, not only the whole civilised world, but his own people, nay, his own official advisers, were arrayed against him. As it was, and without any knowledge of these machinations, Rouvier found much to blame in the attitude of the Russians and many a time he struck the table with his fist and uttered unprintable ejaculations addressed to the distant Tsarist government.<sup>2</sup> Deterrent visions of what would take place if the French got wind of the project flitted before the Kaiser's mind and he forthwith telegraphed a highly argumentative plea for absolute secrecy. If the cabinet in Paris were to suspect what is being done for their benefit and that of Europe the result would be the opposite to that which the Tsar is so anxious to promote. This document with its moral motives will remain on record as a characteristic of the writer, his family, and his country. Here is the essential part of it:

“Best thanks for telegram. You have given me a new proof of your perfect loyalty by deciding not to inform

<sup>1</sup> Confidential Despatch sent on 10th/23rd November, 1904.

<sup>2</sup> Before and during the Algeciras Conference.

France without my agreement. Nevertheless it is my firm conviction that it would be absolutely dangerous to inform France before we both have signed the treaty; it would have an effect diametrically opposed to our wishes. It is only the absolute sure knowledge that we are both bound by treaty to lend each other mutual help that will bring the French to press upon England to remain quiet and keep the peace,<sup>1</sup> for fear of France's position being jeopardised. Should, however, France know that a Russo-German treaty is only projected, but still unsigned, she will immediately give short notice to her friend (if not secret ally) England, with whom she is bound by *entente cordiale*, and inform her immediately. The outcome of such information would doubtless be an instantaneous attack by the two allied powers, England and Japan, on Germany in Europe as well as in Asia. Their enormous maritime superiority would soon make short work of my small fleet and Germany would be temporarily crippled. This would upset the scales of the equilibrium of the world to our mutual harm, and later on, when you begin your peace negotiations, throw you alone on the tender mercies of Japan and her jubilant and overwhelming friends. It was my special wish, and, as I understand, your intention too, to maintain and strengthen this endangered equilibrium of the world through expressly the agreement between Russia, Germany, and France. That is only possible if our treaty becomes a fact before (*sic*), and if we are perfectly *d'accord* under any form. A previous information of France will lead to a catastrophe!—should you, notwithstanding, think it impossible for you to conclude a treaty with me, without the previous consent of France, then it would be a far safer alternative to abstain from concluding any treaty at all. Of course I shall be as absolutely silent about our pourparlers as you will be; in the same manner as you have only informed Lamsdorff, so I have only spoken to Bülow, who guaranteed absolute secrecy. Our mutual relations and feelings would remain unchanged as before,

<sup>1</sup> Already, for the Kaiser's purpose, England was preparing to pounce on Germany or Russia and only their alliance could force her to keep the peace!

and I shall go on trying to make myself useful to you as far as my safety will permit.”<sup>1</sup>

There is one point respecting which I should like to make a correction on behalf of two men who are now unable to make it in defence of themselves, Lamsdorff and Witte. The Kaiser assumes—probably not without what seemed to him satisfactory evidence—that as he had initiated Bülow into his scheme and the progress that he was making, so Nicholas II. had kept his Minister of Foreign Affairs posted as to what was going on. Now if that had been done—and the Kaiser seems to have been told that it was—Witte also would have been apprised of it by his devoted friend, Lamsdorff, who kept nothing from him, whereas Lamsdorff himself in July, 1905, was absolutely ignorant of the transaction. Witte's papers passed through my hands and I know that he had no inkling of what had been agreed upon until after he quitted the Kaiser at Rominten and returned to Russia. His anger when he had read the treaty knew no bounds, his action was prompt and vehement, and it made the Kaiser his bitter enemy for the remainder of his life.

The Russian Tsar still stood shivering on the brink of the Rubicon repeatedly proclaiming his resolve to make the plunge. He has so much to say on the subject of the treaty that he cannot trust any one to cipher it. He prefers to write an autograph letter.<sup>2</sup> The Kaiser replies enjoining the strictest circumspection. “No third power must hear even a whisper about our intentions.”<sup>3</sup>

What took place between the Emperors during the ensuing two months there are no available telegrams to show.<sup>4</sup> Down to Monday, 24th July, 1905, the draft of the secret treaty remained a draft. I know that the Tsar positively affirmed this to Lamsdorff, his minister, in answer to a question as to whether the four clauses of the treaty, which was actually signed on that day, exhausted Russia's

<sup>1</sup> Confidential Despatch sent by the Kaiser on 13th/26th November, 1904.

<sup>2</sup> Confidential Despatch sent on 10th/23rd November, 1904.

<sup>3</sup> Confidential Despatch, 27th November (10th December), 1904.

<sup>4</sup> From 12th December, 1904, until 14th February, 1905.



liabilities as incurred without the minister's knowledge.

The question was necessary because of rumours that were rife about a secret "Nicky-Willy scheme" to proclaim the Baltic a closed sea to all warships except those belonging to the countries whose shores are washed by its waters. It was whispered that the plan had been mooted at Björke and some people—for a while Witte was one of them—believed that the Tsar was a consenting party. Colour was imparted to these rumours by the action of the British government which despatched a naval squadron to the Baltic. Wilhelm II. commenting on this unsolicited visit in a telegram to the Tsar writes: "Either England is anxious on account of our meeting or they want to frighten me!"<sup>1</sup> The despatch in which this passage occurs is worth perusing carefully, because among other curious things it affords us a glimpse of the prudential diplomatic measures which the two imperial conspirators were already taking in view of a war against Britain to be waged by the Russians and the Germans and at a moment too when they both regarded France as virtually England's ally! What Witte afterwards said to me was that this second plan of a campaign against Great Britain was without doubt discussed and agreed upon by the two Emperors, and that the only doubt he had on the subject was whether or no the result of their accord had been reduced to writing. Lamsdorff answered this query in the negative, and Witte's misgivings were laid. What seemed to me probable at a subsequent date when I was in possession of further details was that the Tsar had accepted the Kaiser's proposal for the joint occupation of Denmark, but as in the case of the secret treaty he felt uneasy about the impression it would make on his Danish friends, and in order to get on to the safe side in advance had requested Wilhelm to sound the King of Denmark. Translated into diplomatic language this would have meant the adherence of the Danish State to the Russo-German alliances. And if he failed to lure the King, he still had the Tsar's approval of the alternative—a violation of Denmark's neutrality. The sophisms with which

<sup>1</sup> Confidential Despatch dated 16th/29th July, 1905.

he persuaded himself that after all this violation of the neutrality of the people who had so often and so long entertained his father and himself in their hospitable land was at bottom for their good give one the measure of the backboneless, or what Russians would term the jelly-like, quality that unfitted him for any kind of dealings based on the trust of man in man.

The Tsar's Mentor and seducer, on the other hand, never loses sight of his goal, never flags in his devotion to his country, of which he makes a deity to be worshipped and conciliated by every kind of sacrifice known to human religions. Nor can it be gainsaid that in spite of his utter a-morality—not to give it a worse name—and his organic incapacity to appreciate men of principle and intellectual integrity, he is not without a clear conception of how shape and proportion should be given to his idea of the United States of Europe. Perverted though his moral sense undoubtedly is, he is a political prophet with a very definite faith and a marvellous curiosity for enthusiasm and self-sacrifice. And history will associate his name in one of its darkest pages with the Machiavellian devices by which Russia, the Empire of his "friend," was thrust from among the potent factors of political Europe.

The conduct and character of the two Emperors and the parts they played in one of the most momentous crises of human history reflect in a way the differences between their respective realms. Germany like Russia is a predatory State, but within it is a model of order and organisation. The people are educated, talents are recognised and employed, the sciences and arts are encouraged, opinions are free, the egotism of the State is enlightened. The expansion demanded by Germany is for the good of the race or for its honour and glory. And if the parliament and other institutions are not democratic the reason is because the population is not democratic but hierarchical.

In the Tsardom, on the other hand, we saw rapacity within and rapacity without and no curb to restrain it effectively. Government was neither by the people nor for

them, in truth there was no government, but only regularised anarchy. The social conceptions, the political institutions, the agencies of cultural advance which in Germany challenge admiration were in Russia hindrances instead of helps. And at the head of this vast seething society which resembled a continent, so numerous were its races, languages, and religions, stood a man of dwarfish mental reach, torpid unveracity of heart, and anti-social propensities. Yet this was the official trustee and spokesman of the community which was reckoned to be the world's most powerful State, the man of destiny who dealt the stroke of grace to the mighty Russian Empire.

THE TEXT OF THE SECRET TREATY signed on the 24th July, 1905, is as follows:—

“Their imperial Majesties, the Emperor of all the Russias and the Emperor of Germany, with the object of maintaining peace in Europe, have agreed on the following points of a defensive alliance:—

1. If any European State attacks one of the two Empires the allied party will employ all its naval and military forces to assist its ally.
2. The high contracting parties undertake not to conclude a separate peace with any common adversary.
3. The present treaty will come into force at the moment when peace is concluded between Russia and Japan. A year's notice must be given to terminate it.
4. As soon as this treaty comes into force Russia will take the necessary steps to make France acquainted with it, and will suggest to France that she should participate in it as an ally.”

This covenant, so long as it remained in force, annulled the Russo-French Alliance, so that during the months that lapsed between the meeting of the monarchs at Björke and

the vigorous sally by which Witte and Lamsdorff cancelled it, Russia was separated from her official ally and associated with that ally's enemy. If war had broken out between Britain and Germany or even between France and Germany, and if the Berlin government maintained, as it would have done, that the assailant was Britain or France, the text of this agreement would have obliged Russia to take sides with Germany. Probably because of that corollary Count Witte sometimes spoke of the alliance as aimed against France, that being the aspect which struck him most forcibly. As a matter of fact it was against Great Britain, and he knew it perfectly.

As soon as rumours reached me of the underhand efforts of the Kaiser, I did what I felt justified in doing to warn the Entente nations, and my utterances were as clear as I could fairly make them. Thus I wrote: "Germany's voice apparently carries more weight in autocratic Russia than that of any other power just now. It is soft and sweet and insinuating, and resembles in other respects that of the Lorelei."<sup>1</sup> Again: "Germany thirsts for Russia's friendship as King Richard craved for a horse. That friendship was the making of Germany in the past, and might prove the unmaking of Germany's rivals in the future. To the great Slav power whom she coaxed, flattered, reviled, and injured as her interests demanded under changing conditions, she owes much of what she is and has. And it is obvious to every one acquainted with international politics that without the active and self-denying friendship, or else the paralysis, of Russia in Europe, Germany will never work out her glorious destiny as the great Hohenzollern conceives it. Hence the high bid which she is prepared to make for Russia's support, and the high hopes she cherishes of obtaining it. Prudence, however, is indispensable to success, and *secrecy is part of prudence*."<sup>2</sup> And further: "As without Mercury's sickle Perseus would never have contrived to cut off the head of Medusa, so without France's

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Contemporary Review*, November, 1905, p. 610.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 610.

sword there is little or no hope at present of Germany's cutting down Great Britain's strength and prestige to the needful level. France's co-operation is as necessary as Russia's to the realisation of the Hohenzollern dream of a world Empire, and Germany cannot have it directly for love, or money, or threats. Perhaps Russia's good offices might gain it for her? That expedient, too, has been tried, is still being tried, and will doubtless fail as signally as the flourishing of the whip. 'You cannot win love by violence,' says the Muscovite proverb. Besides, Russia's helpfulness would necessarily cease where self-sacrifice began, and sacrifice of a very serious kind would seem to be the corollary of further efforts in the direction of a Franco-Russo-German coalition." <sup>1</sup>

The gist of one of the Kaiser's arguments to the Tsar I reproduced in an article explaining that Russia's defeat in Manchuria tempted Germany in the person of the Kaiser to use Morocco as a pretext for arranging an alliance with France. I wrote: "Figuratively speaking, a pistol was levelled at the head of the republic, which was accosted with the words, 'Your property or your love.' Since you 'signed the peace treaty in Frankfort-on-the-Main you have been conspiring against me, biding your time, preparing for your opportunity. Dispel your idle dreams, desist from plotting, and become the sincere friend and helpful ally of your enemy of thirty-five years ago. We may then both of us reduce our armies and retrench expenditure. With the Tsardom you need not break. All three we shall then join our naval and military forces and obtain for continental Europe the colonial possessions which it craves and merits, wresting them from the loose grasp of Britain. If you refuse, if you still persist in haunting the forests of the Vosges, then let us try issues and fight it out without delay. Decide without further loss of time.'" <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 611, 612.

<sup>2</sup> *Contemporary Review*, August, 1905, p. 295.



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